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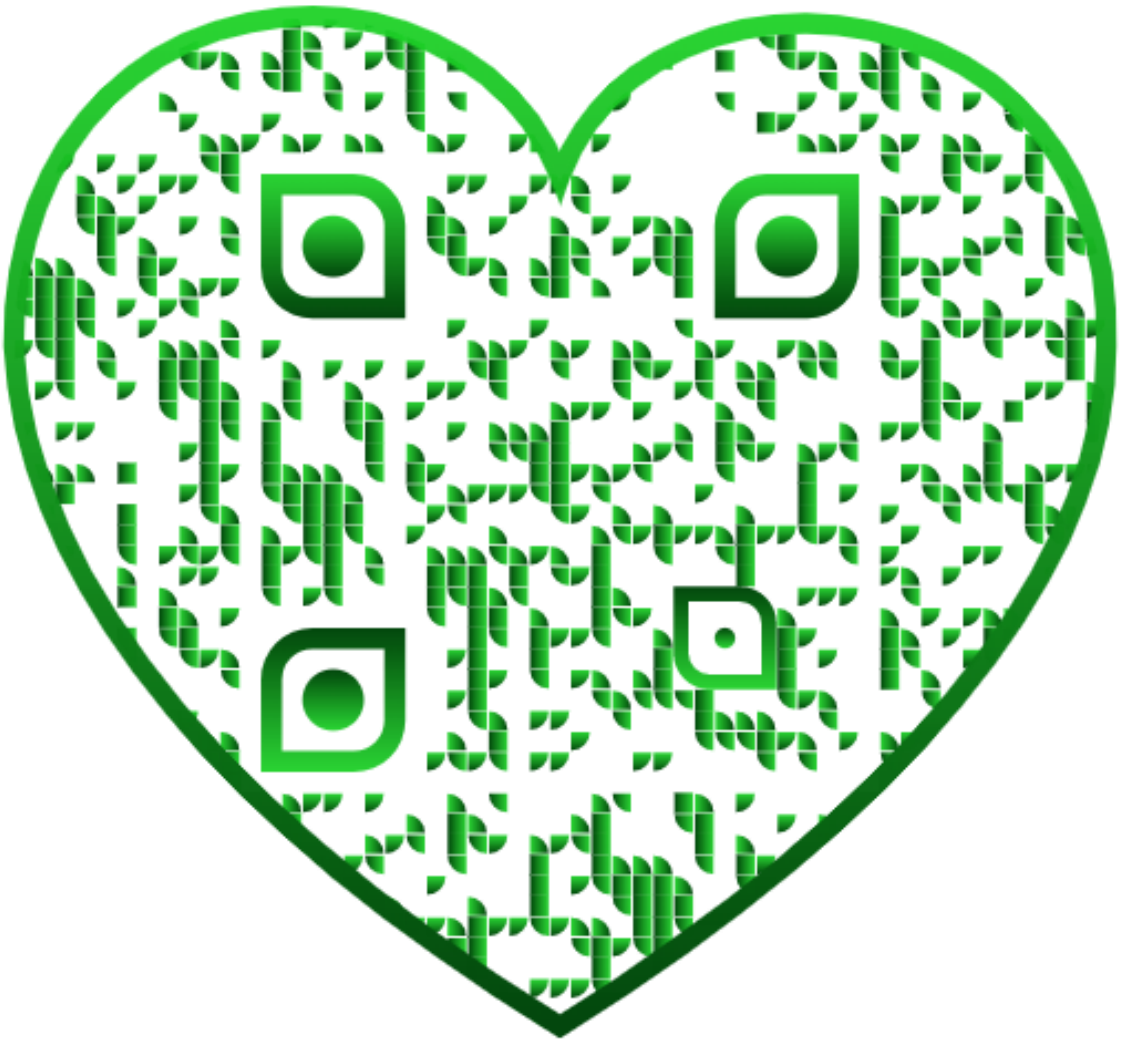

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THAT FITS'

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The Legend and His Rhythm, in Five Tabla Movements

He will turn 73 this month and he has just won three Grammys. But that is not going to slow down the maestro. Ustad Zakir Hussain is as busy with his Hindustani classical and fusion projects as he was when he started his career nearly six decades ago

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Alan Walker On Ai, Gaming, New Music and India Plans

The Norwegian DJ-producer speaks with us about revisiting core memories for the music video to his latest song "Who I Am," building a virtual theme park-like Walker World and more

By Anurag Tagat

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Photograph: **The Dark Entity**

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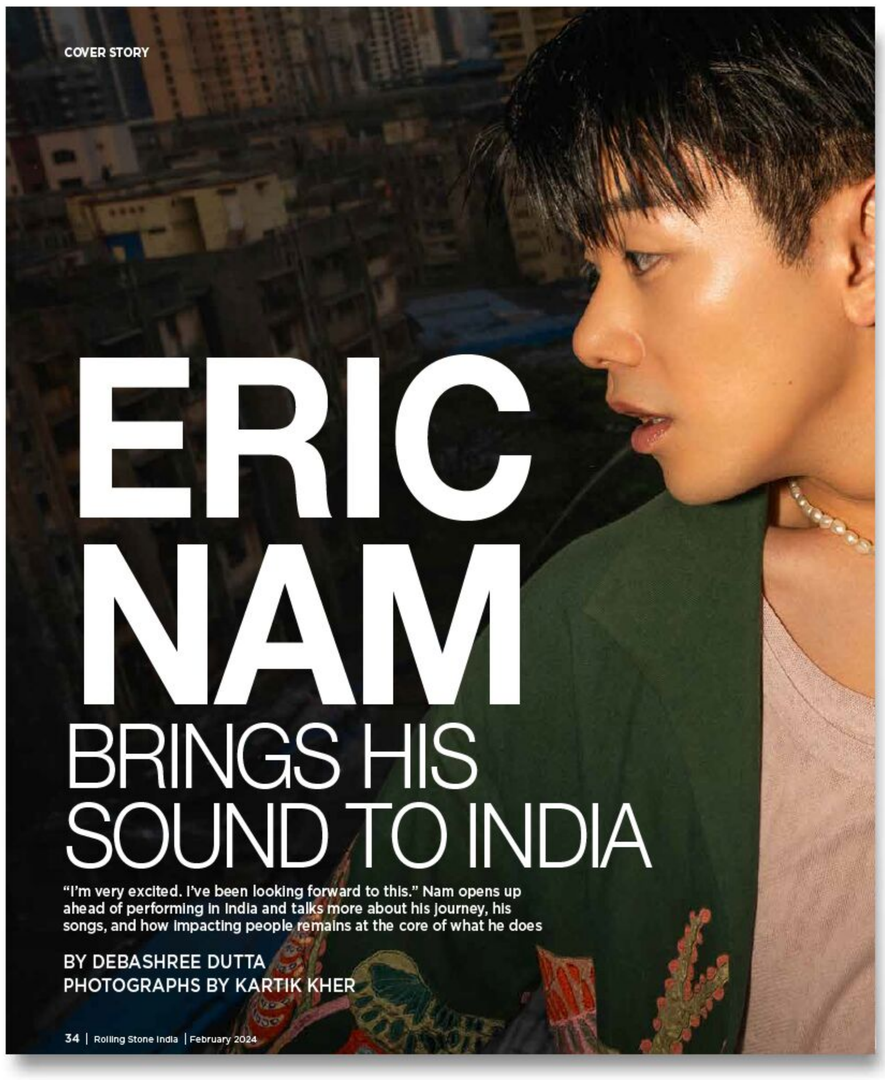
+ LOVE LETTERS & ADVICE



"Eric Nam's journey exemplifies music's power to unite and transcend boundaries."

— Anand Mehra

Celebrating Eric Nam's Musical Journey in India

The recent cover story on Eric Nam's musical voyage in India captivated me. His fusion of sound with our vibrant culture is inspiring. Nam's journey exemplifies music's power to unite and transcend boundaries. The spotlight on this cultural exchange is commendable, highlighting the importance of diversity in music. Nam's collaboration with local artists and interaction with fans showcases the transformative impact of music.

SPOTLIGHT

Sting Is a Musical Marvel

The feature on Sting resonated with me. Iit's a significant milestone for India's music scene that Sting was back in India to perform at Lollapalooza. Sting's timeless music continues to captivate audiences worldwide, and his presence in India signifies our country's emergence as a global music destination.

- Rijul Mehta

Irfana's Inspirations and Future Collaborations

I found the recent piece on Irfana's revelations about the inspiration behind "London Dry" and future collaborations deeply engaging. I appreciate the insights into her creative process and aspirations. Irfana's openness about her artistic journey adds layers to her music, making her work even more compelling. I eagerly anticipate her future collaborations, knowing they will bring fresh perspectives to the music scene.

- Urvashi Rao

An Insight into Sheherazaad

It was captivating to read about Sheherazaad's album 'Qasr' and the creation of the soul-stirring song "Dhund Lo Mujhe." I appreciate the depth of insight provided into Sheherazaad's creative process and inspirations. Her ability to infuse emotion and depth into her music is truly commendable. I eagerly await the release of 'Qasr' and I'm excited to witness the impact of Sheherazaad's heartfelt compositions on the music landscape.

- Tara DeVitre

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Opening Act

Bringing the Weird Art Noise in Brooklyn

WHEN THE BROOKLYN DUO Water From Your Eyes take the stage, their madcap combination of avant-pop loops and deadpan humor can draw a wide range of reactions. “A lot of people come up to the merch table afterwards and they’re like, ‘Yeah, at the beginning I did not understand what was happening and I did not like it, and by the end I *loved* it,’” says singer Rachel Brown. This year, with tour dates opening for established indie draws like Real Estate and Squid, they’ve added a live drummer and spent more time than ever practicing. “We’re trying to be a little more responsible,” adds instrumentalist and producer Nate Amos. “It’s an experiment.” SIMON VOZICK-LEVINSON

Touring drummer Bailey Wollowitz, Amos, Brown, and touring guitarist Al Nardo (from left) rehearse at Amos’ place in Bed-Stuy, Brooklyn.

PHOTOGRAPH BY Sacha Lecca

The Mix

WHAT'S NEW, WHAT'S NEXT, WHAT'S NUTS

The Evolution of RaiNao

How she faced her fears to become one of Puerto Rico's most exciting and original voices

→

RAINAO

It started with a failed math course. "I failed the same class three times," RaiNao says over Zoom. "The third time, I said, 'No, this is not for me.'" So, around 2014, the singer-songwriter born Naomi Ramirez quit her biology major at the University of Puerto Rico and gave up on her plan to become a surgeon, instead pivoting to a new major in theater arts and audiovisual production. "Theater really helped me learn how to utilize my voice," she says.

A decade later, RaiNao, 29, is one of the most exciting voices in urbano. Her music expertly folds jazz, R&B, and alternative-pop touches into sleek reggaeton, creating a refreshing blend of genres that's all her own. It helps that she's also a trained saxophonist with an ear for sounds that stand out and intrigue. "People take longer to understand if you're not following a trend, but making your own," she says.

Speaking on her lunch break while filming a music video, RaiNao looks otherworldly with winged eyeliner and sparkling lime-green eyeshadow. Her hair is perfectly tousled, a signature blond highlight streaking her dark locks. Two nose piercings punctured with silver hoop rings match the chunky necklace of linked circles across her neck.

She describes her life as being like a line of flicked dominoes falling into place. In fact, the name of her debut album, *Capicú*, refers to a play in the popular Caribbean game. "It's like a win-win," she explains. "No matter what you do, you're winning."

RaiNao has been on a roll since the release of her debut EP, *Ahora A.K.A. Nao*, in early 2022. The EP's inventive approach caught the attention of countless new fans, including Bad Bunny, who shared her alt-perreo earworm "LUV" with his global following on social media — then brought her out for one of his homecoming shows in San Juan on the *Un Verano Sin Ti* tour that summer. In 2023, RaiNao had the audience in Austin begging for an encore at her first SXSW showcase. She gained even more fans last year with two appearances on Puerto Rican producer Mora's album *Estrella*. One by one, the dominoes fell in place toward the much-anticipated release of *Capicú* this year. "Our expectations of [the album] don't matter," she says. "We're going to win regardless, because the most important thing is the process, and the process has been beautiful."

Moving across hyperpop, reggaeton, R&B, drum-and-bass, dancehall, and salsa, *Capicú* sounds like nothing else out right now. Horns trill throughout single "Gualero REFF12.31," creating a smooth accent to the song's insistent bongos. RaiNao loves experimenting with new sounds; lately, she says, she's been into the "funky and weird" percussive rhythms heard at Brazilian Carnival celebrations. But her favorite part of making music is writing her clever, evocative lyrics. "I think there's a magic in using words in a way that only you can," she says.

Raised in Santurce, a San Juan neighborhood filled with murals and a booming arts and club scene, RaiNao grew up surrounded by music. Her father held side gigs singing in salsa bands like Pete "El Conde" Rodríguez's. "My dad chased [a career] in music very passionately, all of his life," she says.

RaiNao loved music, too, but she was a shy kid, to the point that she felt terrified of singing in public. The one exception was in front of the audience at her family's church. "I knew I *could* sing because I would sing in the shower and at church," she says. "I wasn't scared because it was the same people every Sunday." Even so, when she tried out for the Escuela Libre de Música, a prestigious music school, RaiNao opted for the saxophone instead of vocals. "I'm sure there's a lot of my friends who are still like, 'WTF, what is she doing?' because I never opened myself up to explore my voice before," she says.

Her anxiety was a serious issue in her teens. "I would get panic attacks," she says, adding that she was once hospitalized during a mental-health crisis. Over time, she learned to quiet her fears of the future, but even then, a career in music seemed like an impossible dream. "I always wanted it, but I never dared to start, because it's hard to make a living out of art," she says. When she told her dad about her plan to switch majors in college, he offered a word of caution about going all in on music. ("You can do both things at the same time," she remembers him saying.)

Just before the pandemic shut down the world in 2020, RaiNao said "Fuck it" and uploaded her first YouTube video: a reggae-infused cover of Puerto Rican salsa singer Víctor Manuelle's "He Tratado." She followed that up with a string of original singles, holding live sessions online occasionally as a way to connect with fans. Her 2021 song "Me Fui" made its way to Sonar, a new label founded by Puerto Rican powerhouse Rimas Music that year with the goal of platforming rising artists. A biting breakup anthem that traverses jazz, rock, and reggaeton, "Me Fui" showcased the best of RaiNao, and soon she had a deal.

Today, RaiNao sounds confident and sure of herself. "We have today to give it our all," she says. "We have to do it *right now*" — which is, of course, a play on her stage name. She chose it by riffing off a nickname ("Nao," for Naomi), which became an online username before taking on new meaning when she started what she calls her "life project." In the Bad Bunny-approved "LUV," RaiNao puts it perfectly: "*¿A que esperar? Mejor RaiNao.*" ("Why wait? It's better RaiNao.")

RaiNao doesn't shy away from exploring vulnerable emotions on *Capicú*. With "Naomi's Interlude," she refers to her past mental-health struggles with the intent of reminding listeners that they're not alone. "I've learned to control it," she says of her anxiety. How exactly? "I really can't do anything other than to make my music and create my reality the way I want to."

Alongside fellow Puerto Rican up-and-comers like Villano Antillano and Young Miko, RaiNao has started a revolution in the male-dominated genre of urbano music — not just with her mix of genres, but with her loudly queer lyrics and unapologetic presence. "We are doing something unprecedented," she says. Not only are she and her peers reinventing the scene on the island, they're blazing a path for new generations to come. "It's really mind-blowing to be a source of inspiration for others who want to dare themselves to do it," RaiNao says.

And she's not going to stop there. This year, RaiNao is out for world domination. "I want to eat the whole world," she says, narrowing her black-rimmed eyes. "And bit by bit, I'll do it." MAYA GEORGI

FAST FACTS

INKED
RaiNao uses a drawing of an hourglass as a logo for her music. Both of her parents got tattoos of the symbol.

GETTING STARTED
Early in her career, RaiNao was a backup singer for her college classmate (and fellow urbano artist) Rafa Pabon.

VIDEO STAR
Last year, she starred in the video for Tainy's single "La Baby" along with Becky G, Camila Cabello, PaoPao, and others.

HAIR AND MAKEUP BY KAMILA PINERO. STYLING BY DANIELA FABRIZI. PHOTOGRAPHY ASSISTANCE BY KARLA SÁNCHEZ.

PHOTOGRAPHS BY **Steph Segarra** | 9

Anoushka Maskey's 'Most of the Days' Pays Homage to Folk Roots

The track features the singer-songwriter's go-to collaborator Cosmic Grooves

IN A WHIRLWIND of emotions and a mere 10 minutes, Sikkim-bred and Mumbai-based singer-songwriter Anoushka Maskey birthed her latest creation, "Most of the Days." Written at the peak of a moment where financial and emotional burdens were threatening to consume her, the song becomes a poignant testament to Maskey's resilience and a departure from her usual musical landscape.

For Maskey, who had successfully navigated years without letting financial pressure or mental challenges define her existence, the emergence of persistent feelings of unrest became a cause for alarm. It was during this crucible of personal turmoil that "Most of the Days" was conceived, an involuntary journey into the realm of a folk ballad, as Maskey reflects on her creative process.

The song marks a full-circle moment for Maskey, harking back to her roots influenced by iconic American folk artists like Bob Dylan and Tom Waits from the Sixties. This return to the genre that shaped her early musical identity adds a layer of authenticity to "Most of the Days," capturing the essence of folk ballads that have historically been a vessel for raw, unfiltered emotions.

Maskey opted for a stripped-down and barebones approach to the song's composition. With just her vocals and an acoustic guitar, "Most of the Days" embodies the simplicity and emotional depth reminiscent of the folk ballads that first inspired her. The inclusion of a whistling section, born out of the creative process, prompted Maskey to expand her musical repertoire by purchasing a harmonica, adding an unexpected yet fitting element to the track.

Collaborating with creative partner Pranay Bakshi, aka Cosmic Grooves, added another layer of richness to the song. Bakshi's newly acquired slide guitar skills seamlessly complemented Maskey's acoustic foundation, completing the arrangement with a touch of musical finesse. The synergy between Maskey and Bakshi demonstrates the power of artistic collaboration, resulting in a composition that transcends personal struggles to become a shared, universal experience.

"Most of the Days" is a soul-baring journey through the complexities of life, translated into a folk ballad that echoes with authenticity. As Maskey and Bakshi intertwine their creative prowess, the track stands as a poignant reminder that great art often emerges from the crucible of personal turmoil, transforming pain into a timeless musical expression. **DAVID BRITTO**

COURTESY OF THE ARTIST

Kapow! Are Releasing A Song Every Month This Year

With two songs – "Experimenting with Hoomans" and "My Favourite Notification" – out so far, the New Delhi rock band are teaming up with The Piano Man

AT THE LAUNCH gig for rock band Kapow!'s new song "Experimenting with Hoomans" last month at The Piano Man Eldeco Centre in New Delhi, strange creatures got on stage to abduct vocalist Mayank Mittal mid-performance. "It was like a Sci-Fi play unfolding for our audience," Kapow! says in a joint email interview.

That song was one out of 12 songs that the band will launch each month, teaming up with one of the capital's only mainstay venues, The Piano Man to have a launch gig for each single every month. In February, they've already released the more Valentine's Day-adjacent love song "My Favourite Notification." On February 14th, expect more theatricality as Kapow! performs at The Piano Man Jazz Club in Safdarjung. "We are dressing it up as Cupid and will be taking over the coziest and the most intimate venue in town. We have a lot of themed activities, games and surprises planned. A big stunt that we will have to keep our mouths shut about," the band says.

In terms of promo plans and a marketing strategy, Kapow! and The Piano Man have likely ventured into new territory in a sense. There are likely plenty of artists who perform monthly at music venues, but each gig will be specifically tailored to mark the launch of a new song. The band says songs have been in the works for over two years and this plan has been in motion for the last 12 months. "We spent months agonizing over the order of songs, the social media content, the artwork, and so much more. KAPOW! has been practically living on Notion, Trello and Calendar for the last few months, and we are eager to share the results," the band adds.

Promising more "inter-dimensional shenanigans" along the way like they did at the launch gig for "Experimenting with Hoomans," Kapow! are bringing in costumes, monologues, "soundscaping" and lighting engineers to create a new experience each time. The idea to release the album in a piecemeal fashion wasn't due to current streaming algorithms' preference for singles, according to the band. It was more to do with the sonic diversity of each song. "We've explored everything from Sci-Fi rock to Seventies Bollywood. A lot of the tracks releasing as singles this year will eventually be compiled into albums, like 'Kaali Billi' and 'Bhedchaal,' which are part of a Hindi hard-rock album called *KAPOW! In the Jungle* and 'Hassi,' and Mausam,' which will be part of a three-song EP called *Zindagi* about a person's journey through life," the band says.

Seemingly run like a company, Kapow! claims to have an R&D department and a marketing department within the band. To that end, visuals and art are also dropping alongside the music, as well as quirky merch suited to each song's theme. That includes Kapow! rolling papers, comics and condoms. "We are planning to disrupt our fans' bank accounts," the band says jointly. Specifically with "Experimenting with Hoomans," Kapow! have a music video that's " more graphic novel than an MTV clip" in the works.

The band is all praise for The Piano Man and its founder Arjun Sagar Gupta for the "support, freedom and resources" to put their song release plan into action in 2024. There isn't an exclusivity clause that prevents them from playing more gigs. The band says they will be "traveling extensively" this year, around India and the world. They add, "Besides doing live shows, we will reach new audiences through the power of the Internet and all it has to offer. We are crafting newer and crazier plans for that, too." ANURAG TAGAT

COURTESY OF THE ARTIST

Long Distances Keep Indie Rock Alive with Debut EP

The five-track 'How the Mighty Will Fall' was released in full last month

RONIT SARKAR

After bursting onto the scene in late 2022, Mumbai-bred act Long Distances has been steadily putting out singles off their debut EP *How the Mighty Will Fall*. Now, the band is out with all five tracks from the record. Comprising multi-instrumentalist Aarifah Rebello, and guitarists-producers Apurv Agrawal and Zubin Pastakia, the band have also been performing the material from the EP live.

When starting the band, Pastakia was told the kind of shoegaze and guitar-based music he wanted to make with Long Distances was "dead." He says, "I really don't think that's the case at all. In fact, people really want more of that. The reaction to a lot of the singles and now the EP has been really positive and that feels good that people have connected with the music."

Work on *How the Mighty Will Fall* kicked off in 2020 with Pastakia inviting people to make music with him. Agrawal initially came on board as a sound engineer for the group's third single "Delicate Surrender" and says, "We had such a great time working on that song and generally making music together that it just kind of organically went from there to me working on the rest of the EP to now being part of the band." Rebello adds, "With respect to writing and recording, there's been a learning curve. Especially because we started remotely during the pandemic, so from figuring out DIY recording booths, and each other's creative processes, to holding space for individual artistic expression while being able to consolidate all of that into one unit has been good learning!"

"The reaction to a lot of the singles and now the EP has been really positive and that feels good that people have connected with the music," says Pastakia.

Overall, *How the Mighty Will Fall* is a tremendously well-written, recorded and engineered EP. The songs stand out with plenty of dynamism, catchy elements, hooky sections as well as contagious melodies. Indie rock lovers are sure to grasp onto this record for its well-crafted guitar-based tunes. Lyrically, Pastakia says, "[The EP is about] love, loss, lament and the longing for liberation. The stuff of life. We don't write music to escape the world, but we are very much situated in the contemporary socio-technological context."

The band were programmed to perform at last month's Lollapalooza India as the opening act of the festival. However, due to technical glitches, they weren't able to play out the full set that they prepared for. "We've been in touch with the organizers and have been offered a better slot next year in word, so we'll be back even better," says Pastakia.

Long Distances are currently gearing up for a gig in April at Mumbai's G5A while also continuing to plot for more shows across India. The group has grown too with backing vocalist/synth player Gouri Ranjit, bassist Adil Kurwa and drummer Karun Kannampilly now joining the band. Pastakia says, "They're absolutely fantastic musicians and good friends." There's also new material already in the works and Agrawal says, "It'll be a different process [with new members] and we're excited to see how that shapes new songs." Rebello adds, "[We're] honing in on who and what Long Distances is in its core with the whole band, we're just going to keep on keeping on, wherever that takes us."

DAVID BRITTO

Rahul Advani's Latest Song 'Fire Burning' Addresses Toxic Relationships

The track is set to appear on the Mumbai-based artist's forthcoming EP 'Elements'

Mumbai-based singer-songwriter Rahul Advani has just released his third single, the blazing "Fire Burning." The track follows his previous offerings such as "Ready To Breathe" and "Oh My."

Collaborating with Vinod Ramanarayanan on the ghatam and Singaporean guitarist Addy Rasidi, the track weaves together Eighties rock guitars with South Indian percussion. The result is a soundscape that mirrors the tension of toxic relationships, capturing the essence of manipulation, gaslighting, and the eventual liberation from such emotional shackles.

Advani shares that the lyrics are a reflection of the moment when one realizes the erosion of self in the clutches of an unhealthy connection. The opening lines, "How many times do you have to lie before you crack, you're driving down a one-way street and you can't turn back," echo the internal struggle and awakening that comes when the signs of a doomed relationship can no longer be ignored. In a departure from his previous releases, Advani takes a darker turn both sonically and lyrically, crafting a fierce song that mirrors the intensity of a relationship engulfed in flames.

The artist has also initiated a dance challenge, inviting listeners to groove to the clap-led rhythms and drum-heavy, energetic chorus of "Fire Burning."

Looking ahead, the singer-songwriter is poised to release an EP titled *Elements*, featuring his three singles to date along with a new track called "Goodbye My Friend." Apart from that, the musician is also busy recording new material and assembling a live set to share his songs with audiences across India.

DAVID BRITTO

INDRAJIT ADVANI

The 2024 Mahindra Blues Festival lineup during the all-star jam.

The Blues Was Felt and How at The Mahindra Blues Festival 2024

The event took place at Mumbai's Mehboob Studio on February 10th and 11th

THIS YEAR, the Mahindra Blues Festival held at Mumbai's Mehboob Studio celebrated its 12th edition and it did so with a groundbreaking twist – an all-women lineup that brought the house down and raised the bar for blues enthusiasts across the nation.

For two electrifying evenings, on February 10th and 11th, Mehboob Studio transformed into a haven for blues aficionados who gathered to soak in the soul-stirring tunes of some of the finest female artists in the genre. From the haunting ballads of the Mississippi Delta to the gritty rhythms of Chicago, the festival showcased the diversity of blues music, weaving together tales of love, loss, and redemption.

As the sun set over the Arabian Sea, Mumbai came alive with the sounds of Tipriti Kharbangar, the longtime vocalist of Shillong blues band Soulmate, whose raw energy and powerhouse vocals set the stage on fire. Joining her was Mumbai-based singer Kanchan Daniel, whose soulful singing hit all the right spots.

Vanessa Collier's mesmerizing saxophone solos added a touch of jazz to the proceedings while Dana Fuchs's epic performance put the icing on the cake on day one. The festivities continued on day two with Samantha Fish's electrifying guitar riffs and Sheryl Youngblood's powerhouse vocals, leaving the audience spellbound and craving for more.

But the Mahindra Blues Festival isn't just about celebrating established acts – it's also about nurturing new talent and ensuring that the blues legacy endures for generations to come. This year, the festival provided a platform for emerging artists like New Delhi's Big Bang Blues and The Beatz Crew, showcasing their undeniable talent and adding a fresh perspective to the genre.

Beyond the music, the festival offered a holistic sensory experience, with attendees indulging in specially curated culinary delights and exploring exclusive merchandise stalls. The festival also showcased moving paintings by renowned artists, highlighting the deep cultural significance of blues music in India's diverse artistic landscape.

As the curtains fell on another unforgettable edition of the Mahindra Blues Festival, one thing became abundantly clear – the blues isn't just a genre of music; it's a way of life. And in Mumbai, where the hustle and bustle never seem to cease, the Mahindra Blues Festival provides a much-needed escape.

Looking ahead, the Mahindra Blues Festival promises to continue pushing the boundaries of creativity and inclusivity, cementing its status as one of the premier music festivals in the country. And as long as there are hearts yearning for the soulful strains of the blues, Mehboob Studio will remain a beacon of hope. **DAVID BRITTO**

COURTESY OF THE MAHINDRA BLUES FESTIVAL

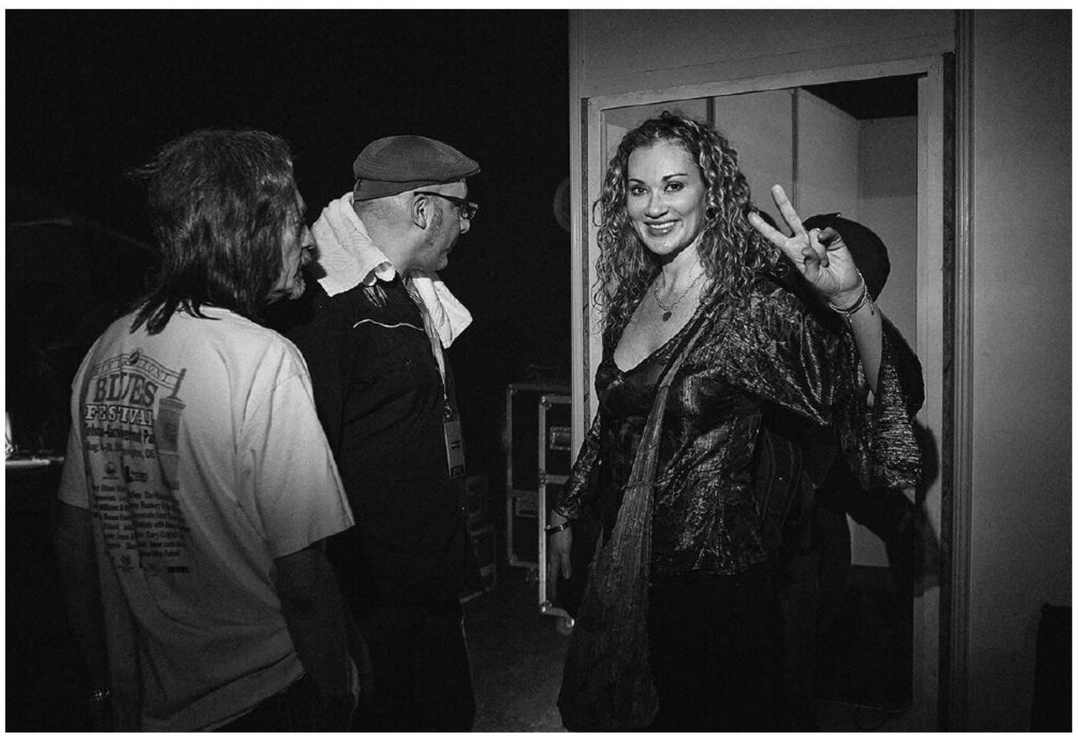
Dana Fuchs: 'I Think There Is Power In Vulnerability'

The American artist performed at this year's Mahindra Blues Festival in Mumbai

ON A SUNNY MORNING in Mumbai, the opportunity to speak candidly with the highly acclaimed American blues-rock singer Dana Fuchs presented itself. Often likened to legendary figures such as Janis Joplin and Tina Turner due to her captivating voice and dynamic stage presence, Fuchs shares insights with *Rolling Stone India*. With a blend of rock, soul, gospel, and blues, Fuchs captivates audiences worldwide with raw emotion. Her albums consistently garner rave reviews and chart success, including top 10 rankings on *Billboard*. Not only a renowned musician, Fuchs also boasts an acting career, notably starring in Across the Universe. Her latest album, "Borrowed Time" was released in 2022 via Ruf Records.

Your vocal prowess and stage presence have drawn comparisons to iconic musicians like Otis Redding, Tina Turner, and Mick Jagger. How do you channel the raw energy and emotion of these legendary artists into your own performances?
You know, I feel like anytime I get on stage, I must live up to the reputation of just putting on a great show that the audience can feel connected to. And I think that's part of the reason I get those comparisons. Because those iconic artists who are who I emulated and it wasn't just their voices, it was the presence, it was the energy, the way they embodied the music. And I remember, the first time I ever saw a clip of Otis Redding singing live at Monterey Park, I was like, 19, and my jaw dropped. And I said, 'That's how it has to be. It must be that kind of emotion. It has to be that real.' So, it's just something that I have to find every time I get on stage.

As both a singer and actress, you've showcased your talents in various mediums. How do you approach the creative process differently when recording music compared to preparing for a role on screen?
In the studio, it's quite different. It takes a minute. What I found in the last few albums I made, which, you know, it took a few albums to learn, is that I am such a live singer and I really need to feed off of the musicians. So in the last few albums, I had to be in the room with them. And we had to make it in a way that we could keep some of the original vocals because when you go back and try to redo it and you're not with the band anymore, you're separated. It was never as good. So now it's just got to be live. There was a reason they think back in the day they made albums in just a few days and everybody was just live, feeding off of each other. Yeah, that's the trick for me because the studio is so different. Then I love the fact that you can add all these different colors and flavors as you go, which I can't do live.



Your performances are known for their ability to evoke deep emotions, ranging from sensitivity to intense energy. How do you balance vulnerability with power on stage, and what do you hope audiences take away from your live shows?
That's such a great question. I've never been asked that. I think there is power in vulnerability. I think if you can let yourself be vulnerable, you gain that much more power. Because it lets people in, in a way, and when you let people in, and then they come after the show and say, 'Wow, I experienced something like that in my family or in my life,' you've made this instant connection. And that's where I get the energy from the people.

Your role as Sadie in *Across the Universe* garnered widespread acclaim, showcasing your acting talents alongside your musical abilities. How does your experience in film inform your approach to storytelling in your music, and vice versa?
I think that's also a really good question. What's so interesting about your question is that it just answered a question for me. I remember when I would film and sometimes you would go in at two in the morning, and you'd be brought back the next day at four in the morning. Just bleary-eyed and I could never go to sleep unless I blogged about that particular filming day, and I ended up writing a whole blog about the making of the film. And it really got me into this storytelling mindset. Yeah. So I think absolutely, you know, everything we do creatively, I think feeds that creative side in us and you can always tap into it and merge them. Yeah. AARYAMAN TRIVEDI

COLSTON JULIAN

Echoes of Earth Goa Included Intriguing Installations, Manic Music and Vivacious Vibes

India's renowned eco-conscious celebration made its debut in the vibrant state of Goa from February 2nd to 4th, 2024

Set against the backdrop of Goa's lush landscapes and rich culture, Echoes of Earth seamlessly integrated the ethos of sustainability and conservation with the pulsating beats of art, culture, and music. Under the theme 'Ensemble of the Wild,' the festival put the spotlight on Goa's diverse ecosystems, moving beyond its famed beaches to showcase its thriving wildlife.

Partnering with local environmental champions, grassroots organizations, and the Government of Goa, Echoes of Earth ignited a renewed appreciation for Goa's natural wonders. By curating an immersive festival experience tailored for art enthusiasts, music lovers, and eco-conscious individuals alike, the event made for a haven for creativity and environmental stewardship.

Spanning across a sprawling 100-acre landscape in Chopdem, Echoes of Earth hosted over 40 international and local artists across four meticulously crafted stages, offering attendees an unforgettable journey through sound and visuals. In addition to the stellar lineup of musical performances, the festival also featured a vibrant array of art installations, educational workshops, cultural showcases, and a sustainable flea market with eco-friendly brands.

Drawing inspiration from the biodiversity hotspot of the Western Ghats, Echoes of Earth's thematic focus underscores the interconnectedness of nature's wonders. Collaborating with esteemed partners such as the Goa Tourism Board, Goa State Biodiversity Board, WWF-INDIA, and Felis Films, the festival is committed to championing the conservation efforts aimed at preserving Goa's delicate ecosystems.

Roshan Netalkar, the visionary Founder & Festival Director of Echoes of Earth, shared his passion for the project, emphasizing the festival's potential to catalyze environmental awareness and responsible tourism. Netalkar envisions Echoes of Earth as a catalyst for positive change, inspiring communities to embrace sustainable practices and preserve Goa's natural heritage.

With Echoes of Earth's inaugural edition in Goa now done, it has signaled a new era of conscious celebration in the heart of India's coastal paradise. **DAVID BRITTO**

COURTESY OF ECHOES OF EARTH GOA

The Mix

Varijashree Venugopal Signs to GroundUP Music Label by Snarky Puppy's Michael League

The Bengaluru vocalist, composer and flautist's debut album 'Vari' will arrive in May 2024

BENGALURU-BASED Carnatic and fusion artist Varijashree Venugopal is the first Indian signed to GroundUP Music, the label run by American band Snarky Puppy's bandleader Michael League. Venugopal, a composer, vocalist and flautist, will release her debut album *Vari* via the label that's home to Grammy-winning artists in May 2024. The first single "Ranjani" sees the artist bring in banjo veteran Bela Fleck, League, Indian percussion ace BC Manjunath and more.

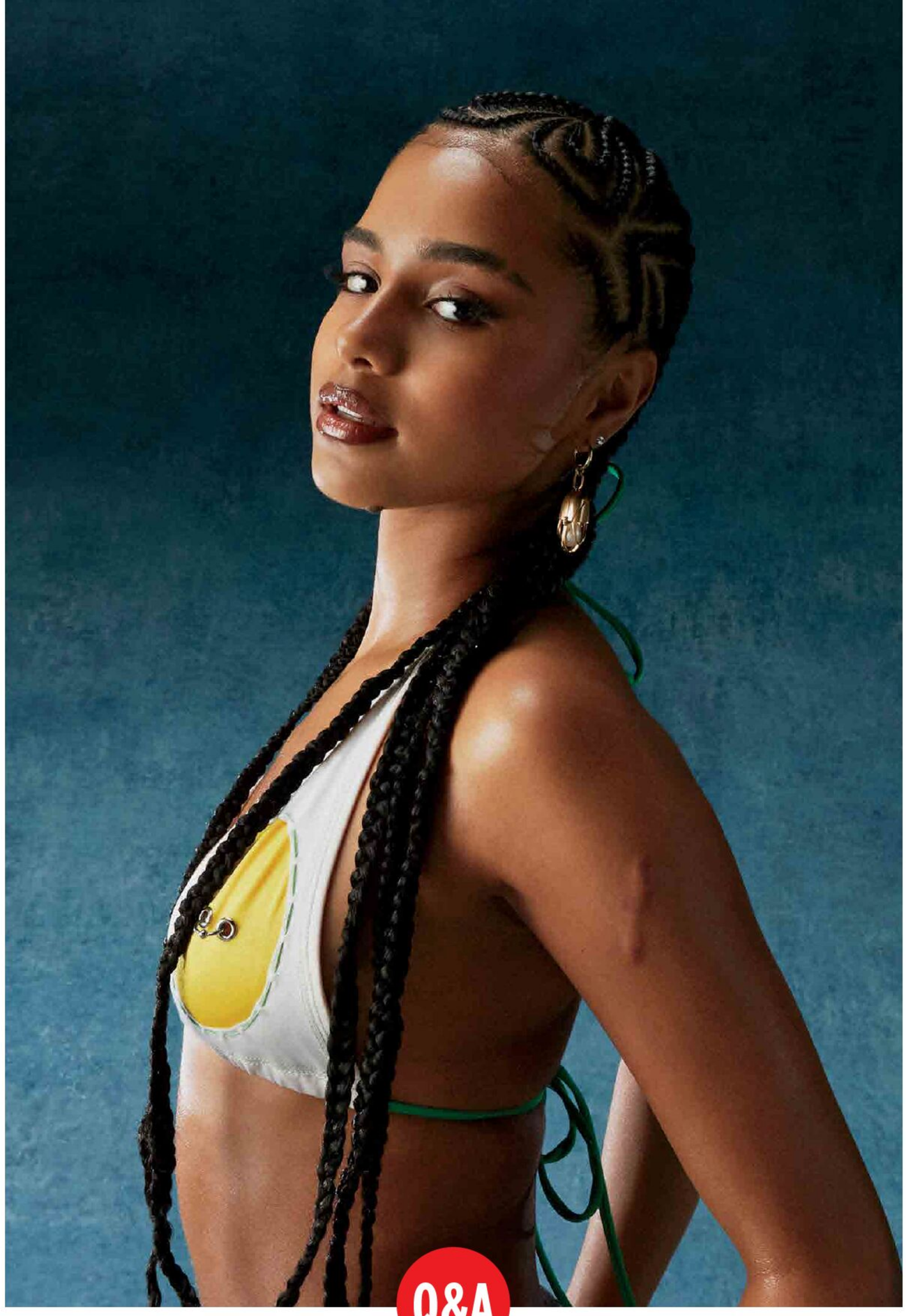
The announcement comes as Venugopal and her group of musicians traveled to Miami for the GroundUP Music Festival and performed on February 4th, alongside the likes of Snarky Puppy, Venezuelan act C4 Trio and jazz multi-instrumentalist Nate Wood. The Indian artist performed songs off *Vari* for the first time at the festival. Venugopal confirms that the album will be out in May 2024, with a single coming up this month.

She says in a statement about signing with GroundUP Music, "Presenting the sound and soul of Indian music to the world on a global music platter has been my life goal. As a student of Carnatic music, this is the biggest way in which I can celebrate the culture of my land. This journey of mine is meeting it's first of milestones in the form of my upcoming original music album *Vari*. There could not have been anyone better than the magnificent genius and my dear friend Michael League (Snarky Puppy) to produce my album. It is an immense honor to be the first Indian artist to be published on GroundUp Music, a USA-based record label that is a 'by artists – for artists' record label always standing in support of uniquely original music and music makers."

League, who has worked as producer on *Vari* has visited India a few times in the past, most recently with Snarky Puppy performing in Mumbai and Gurugram in December 2023. He adds in his statement about working with Venugopal, "For us at GroundUP, it's an honor to welcome Varijashree Venugopal to the label as our first Indian artist. With her album, *Vari*, she exemplifies the philosophy that GroundUP was built upon – innovation through mastery of tradition. We are thrilled to support her in her musical journey of breaking barriers and carrying the rich legacy of Carnatic music into new and unexpected places."

According to the label's website, GroundUP Music releases have drawn more than 40 million annual streams from 160 countries. Spanning jazz, world, R&B, rock, and more, albums by David Crosby, Snarky Puppy, Michael League, Bokanté, Becca Stevens, House Of Waters, Cory Henry are more have been part of the roster. ANURAG TAGAT

ERIC MEURICE



Q&A

Tyla

The South African pop star on staying true to herself, dancing all night, and her Belieber past

By LARISHA PAUL

When Tyla was making her hit single "Water," she had a simple goal in mind. "I just wanted a summer song that everybody could vibe to and have fun to," the South African singer told Rolling Stone last year. "The meaning of the song is frisky: It's me letting a guy know, 'Show me what you got to offer. I'm done with all the talk.'"

Her plan worked, to the tune of 382 million Spotify streams, the first-ever Grammy Award for Best African Music Performance, and a career with as much forward momentum as anyone's in 2024. As she readies her debut album, *Tyla*, she is still set on making you sweat, making you hotter — and making you remember what it's like to watch a pop star rise to the top.

She's also trying to rewrite some narratives in the music industry. "A lot of artists have shown love for African music and African culture, which is amazing, but I'd love to see a lot more African artists showcasing that and being at the forefront of it," Tyla, 22, tells Rolling Stone now over Zoom. The record — which features star-studded collaborations with Gunna and Tems, among others — is the culmination of years of work, despite what Tyla's apparent overnight success might lead you to believe.

She'd like to create a "perfect blend" between African and Western music. "Pop stardom is just being huge — huge songs, huge influence, and making history, and being remembered for something," Tyla says.

That's why she's capturing every moment for future documentaries; championing amapiano, South Africa's globally popular house-music style; and doing her best to manifest potential pop collaborations with the likes of Drake and Justin Bieber. "When I listen to the album, I'm so proud of it," she says. "I just see our sound going so far: the culture, the words, the slang. Even just Joburg — the thought of people now singing about Joburg."

You started posting on TikTok in March 2020, and now you're releasing your debut album in March 2024. Looking back over those four years, what was the greatest lesson that you learned?

Basically just to trust in myself and be patient. Because even though I knew that the day would come because of God — I love God, and I love praying — and even though I had a feeling that this was my calling and it was gonna come, naturally, there were days where I would doubt. I'd be like, "When is it going to happen? Is it going to happen? Is it not meant for me?"

You've been influenced by Rihanna, and you're frequently compared to her. It seems like people have nostalgia for what it *felt like* to first experience Rihanna in the 2000s, more than your actual sound. How do you feel about that comparison?

I love it. I feel like I understand it completely, because I've felt that way as well. I could have easily just sang pop, or easily just sang whatever. But I really wanted to make something new and fresh and bring something different to the industry. That's what I strive to do, with literally everything that I do when it comes to video, music, vibe, clothing, everything. I love that people feel like it's nostalgic *and* a breath of fresh air.

Even going by your first name has a star quality about it. Rihanna, Beyoncé, Zendaya, Madonna. What statement are you making by having your first record be self-titled?

It's my introduction, so I just wanted it to be easy: *Tyla*. Plain and simple, letting people know I'm here. This is me. This is what I'm coming with. I really wanted to give a statement because I think that shows confidence, and I'm just ready. I've been working on this for so long. And even though people think I just [arrived] a few weeks ago, I've literally been working for very long on this. Self-titled was the only way for my first album.

You've talked about making a time capsule of your life right now, saving those moments to remember. How do you approach that?

I'm very much a big dreamer, and I believe that if I act as if I got something already, it will come to me. So we are always shooting everything and anything, and we always say years from now, when we do a Tyla documentary, this will be so good.

Some people might be like, "Girl, you're not going to get a documentary." But I don't know, everything is about feeling, and I feel like this is gonna go crazy. I love old digital cameras, film cameras, and things that look old — but also still things that are new, because you never know. Years from now, iPhone footage may look ancient.

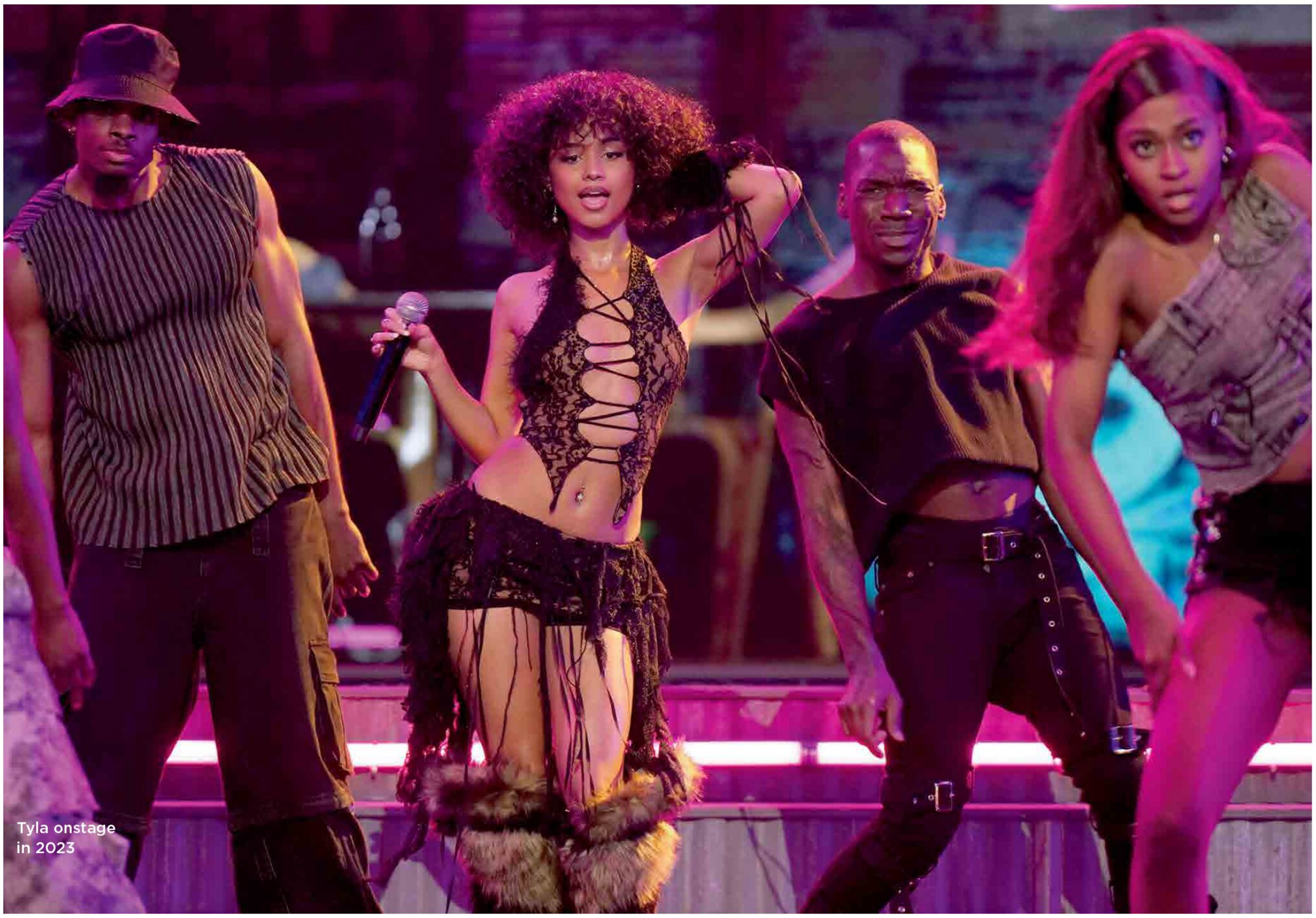
Do you have a favorite pop documentary?

Beyoncé's, obviously. But then also I really like Katy Perry's and Justin Bieber's. I used to be a huge Belieber — oh, my word.

He's also someone who has dabbled outside of the pop world. He even had Burna Boy on his most recent album.

I have to meet him at least once. He definitely has shown

JEREMY SOMA



Tyla onstage in 2023

"Parties close way too early in America. Why are you guys going home at 2 a.m.? Our parties go till whenever."

love to African music and African culture, especially with the remix of [WizKid and Tems'] "Essence" and all of that. I can tell that he really enjoys that vibe. And I mean, he's always explored in his career. So maybe there'll be a Justin Bieber and Tyla song.

You've been manifesting a Drake collaboration, too. Which of the many eras of Drake would you most want to work with?

Yo, every era is so good. I really enjoyed his album *More Life*. That was an album that I kept playing because it was also very dance-y and had South African vibes in it. You know, like "Passionfruit," "Get It Together." That's the type of vibe. I feel like we could create something fire.

What's the biggest difference between parties in America and South Africa?

Firstly, parties close way too early in America. Why are you guys going home at 2 a.m.? Our parties go till whenever — some people leave at 1 p.m. the next day. In America, I feel like the parties are more for networking than partying. In South Africa, it's literally purely just to dance. Everyone is dancing.

What if you go out somewhere and the music isn't hitting? Do you try to make the most of it anyway?

If I'm with friends, then we can make the party by ourselves in our own section and we'll be fine. But if you're just going out and it's dry, I'd rather be home. I'm not really a party girl, so I won't force anything.

That message of putting yourself first appears a few times on your album. How do you decide which opportunities to say no to in order to put yourself first, while still maintaining your momentum?

Health, as well as happiness, are so important. I'm happy that I have a team that never pressures me into doing anything that I don't want to do. At the end of the day, that's it. This is a job, you know? It's not really my life. I feel like some people lose that when they stretch themselves further than they need to.

Being one of the first South Africans to make pop hits in this era means having your identity be somewhat unfamiliar to Western audiences. We saw that last year with commentary around how the word "coloured" functions differently in the context of America (where it's seen as a slur) versus South Africa (where it's used to refer to people of mixed heritage). How did you prepare for that cultural gap?

Obviously, things will come and it'll be out of your control, because you are now in the public eye, and you are introducing people to new things. Because of where I'm from, that's gonna happen regardless. I'm just here being Tyla, creating what I create, and not really trying to start anything. I can understand both sides of the arguments. I just feel like I want the focus to be on the music, not really what race I am.

You have a feature with Tems on the album. Are there things you've been able to bond over, or confide in each other about?

We have the same goals in terms of spreading our sound and our culture to the world and dominating the industry. Also being two girls from Africa breaking down walls, we're very much supportive. I'm happy that we were able to create something so pretty with a good message. It's just cool that we're both African girls doing it.

What are you hoping to accomplish in the next four years?

I'm hoping that more people get tuned in and they see what we have to offer, because we're really just taking it to a different level. I don't think people understand the plans that we have. Everything that I'm planning on doing and the music and the culture and everything that's coming with it ... it's bigger than people think.

TYLER GOLDEN/NBC

ALAN WALKER ON AI, GAMING, NEW MUSIC AND INDIA PLANS

The Norwegian DJ-producer speaks with us about revisiting core memories for the music video to his latest song "Who I Am," building a virtual theme park-like Walkerworld and more

By **Anurag Tagat**

ONE OF THE THINGS all musicians get asked about – whether they like it or not – is the impact of artificial intelligence (AI) on art in these times. We ask Norwegian DJ-producer Alan Walker whether he's tired of fielding questions about AI and he's actually rather welcoming.

Speaking over a video call from Oslo ("It's a lot colder than it was in the U.S.," he says), Walker regards AI in music to be in a "very early developing stage." Describing it as "cool but a little bit scary," but also reminds us about the sea change that's taken place in modern music recording technology, which allows anyone to produce music from pretty much anywhere and with anyone in the world. He ultimately concludes and says, "I think for an artist, it's always important to adapt and see where it will take you. But with AI, it's really hard to say what the result and outcome will be."

Walker has always engaged with bigger tech changes, like creating Walkerworld in the game *Fortnite* and more. Even his newest video for the introspective song "Who I Am" – which progresses like an EDM ballad, if there ever was one – brings in a bit of animation and features the artist looking back at different key moments in his life, with family, friends and peers, plus the biggest gigs.

In an interview with *Rolling Stone India*, Walker talks about the making of his latest song, how he plans to release one song each month and where India figures in his plans this year. Excerpts:

Rolling Stone India: What was it like making "Who I Am" and the music video, especially to dive into the process emotionally for all this footage we see from your past?

Alan Walker: I think it's a big step for all of us artists who are involved in the son. It's a song that kind of takes a deep dive in what's defining you as a person and also as an artist. We wanted to showcase that through the music video, so you show the upbringing, you show what's happened in your life. Also, there could be good moments, it could also be bad moments, it could be sad moments. But it's all moments that are leading up to defining you or as we would call it, 'Who I Am.'

In the video, there's so much of your personal life that we get to see. Did you have to pick some things over the others, in terms of core memories? What was it like choosing what made it into the video that way?

We'd been looking at a lot of moments back in the past, from before I was starting to make music, and also around the times when I got started, when things started to really start rolling and get bigger and bigger. So it was a lot of very core, meaningful moments that we wanted to capture in the music video, but also very defining for what has led to me where I am today. I think it's pretty cool also for me to just look back and suddenly see those clips in a music video, because sometimes I also kind of forget and go, 'Oh, wow, that was actually that long ago' or 'That really happened.'

COURTESY OF THE ARTIST

“PEOPLE REALLY WANT ME TO COME BACK TO INDIA, AND I CAN’T WAIT. I THINK WE’LL BE PLANNING TO DO SOME SHOWS AROUND INDIA AND MAYBE EXPLORE SOME NEW CITIES THAT I HAVEN’T BEEN TO BEFORE.”

“Who I Am” progresses in a very emotional way as a song. Was it a conscious decision to write something that drew from emotions rather than just give it the familiar EDM structure?
So with the song lyrics being the way they are and that becoming the message we want to convey, I think that makes perfect sense for it to be [this way]. It’s something that I also stand by very much – to be an inspiration, but also to aspire and inspire both myself.

What was it like working with Putri Ariani and Peder Elias? How did that sort of collaboration come along for this track?
So we had the song demo for ‘Who I Am’ ready for quite a while, but I worked with Putri on a performance I did in Indonesia, and that’s when I really recognized her voice as being truly remarkable. And Peder, he also has tremendous success in Asia. So I felt like it could be a good trio collaboration that we could do there, because Putri has the Asian market and I also have the market globally, but also massively in Asia and India especially. I think it was really cool.

In terms of the artists you seek out for collaborations or the ones who come to you, sometimes you’re also thinking about the audience, like how someone has a good fan base in Asia. How have you changed the way you think about collaborations?
I always just look for a natural talent, and then I don’t care if you’re a huge artist or if you’re just a songwriter that has a very nice voice, because there’s so many collaborations and songs that I’ve done with up and coming artists and some larger artists. I think there’s no point in setting limitations because it could be the next banger with whomever. So you don’t have to be, like, a super famous artist to work with me. I think it’s a nice way to find and discover new talents and give them exposure to also help them boost their careers.

You also recently worked on a song with YouTuber Vikkstar123 and Dash Berlin for “Better Off (Alone Pt. III).” It seems to build on your continuing association with the gaming world.

It’s kind of like those two worlds are just like meant to be with each other. There are no gamers who don’t love electronic dance music. I think that’s really cool. When I started off with making music, I was gaming and making music for fun on the side.

I wanted to cater the music that I released to the gamers. I released my music non-copyrighted because I wanted gamers, streamers, content creators to use the music for free and then just build my audience from there on.

Working with Vikkstar, for example, is super cool because he’s a gamer. I think he uploaded one video every single day for like five years. Every single day. That’s a lot of videos, but it shows how passionate people are within that industry. He wanted to start making music and I think that’s really cool and that he also steps into that world. It makes sense, he’s a gamer and gaming and music have such a tight connection.

What has the reception been like for Walkerworld within *Fortnite*?
It creates a whole different experience for both Walker fans and regular gamers who can try out the island that we created.

We built it as a theme park, so every journey in there or experience is kind of like a theme park ride. That gives us the opportunity to just open new rides, open new experiences within Walkerworld. We have a ton of opportunities to take this and develop it and just build it to the next level for each and every time we have an update.

How involved are you with things like Walkerworld?
Being a gamer myself, it’s super important that I enjoy it myself, because if I wouldn’t be enjoying it, how can other people enjoy it? For me, it felt like a very fun, interactive experience to just go around, experience the music, see through the progression from the early days of Alan Walker to where we are today with Walkerworld. This is the overall journey there.

You’re performing in Dubai this March. Are you passing by India by any chance?
For India, we are looking into doing more shows. We didn’t stop by India last year, and that’s the first time in quite a while where there hasn’t been anything. It was also kind of good to take a little bit of a break from India, make people hyped for our return and I’ve seen it on social media. People really want me to come back to India, and I can’t wait. I think we’ll be planning to do some shows around India and maybe explore some new cities that I haven’t been to before.

What else is coming up in 2024?
So for this year, we made the decision to have a little bit of a challenge, and that will be to release one single per month. To kick it off, we did ‘Who I Am’ and now in February, we’ll be releasing a new one. I think we are on the right path. It will definitely be more than 12 songs. I think we have too many songs that I feel are ready and good to go out. ®

COURTESY OF JTBC

K-DRAMA FLASHBACK: 'ITAEWON CLASS'

With Park Seo-joon as Park Sae-ro-yi taking center stage, the drama is his journey of revenge, growth, and love, but it also questions prejudice, promotes inclusivity, and celebrates diversity with other unique characters

By **DEBASHREE DUTTA**

ITAEWON CLASS (2020) stands out in its original and unique premise. After an accident claims his father's life, Park Sae-ro-yi (Park Seo-joon) plots to kill Jang Geun-won (Ahn Bo-hyun), a mighty Jang Dae-hee's (Yoo Jae-myung) son. To thrive and exact revenge upon his release, Sae-ro-yi opens a bar-restaurant, DanBam in the multicultural neighborhood of Itaewon, but he lacks commercial acumen. This is when he encounters Kim Da-mi's Jo Yi-seo.

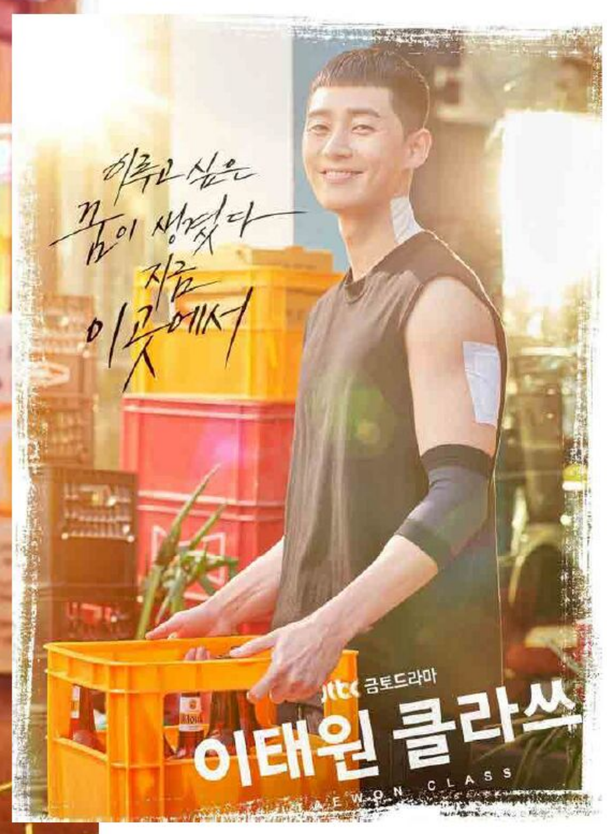
A gripping narrative with heaps of unexpected twists, Sae-ro-yi's odyssey keeps us hooked. Yet *Itaewon Class*'s examination of social issues and the hardships confronting marginalized groups is what sets it apart. Following Sae-ro-yi's experiences, the series tackles societal hierarchy, prejudice, and the fight for fairness. *Itaewon Class*, I feel, invites us to reflect critically on what's happening around us while also functioning as a learning resource and source of entertainment.

I dig *Itaewon Class* for its intricate yet well-realized characters. Its protagonists, from the gregarious and resilient Sae-ro-yi to the self-reliant and feisty Yi-seo, individually cultivate an emotional attachment that lasts past screen time via their trials and personal growths.

The show also spends time delving into the subtleties of morality and the ambiguities inherent in human nature. It presents flawed and morally gray people, subverting accepted notions of valor and villainy. The characters seem more real and relatable as a result of this nuanced portrayal, which also gives the story a deeper meaning.

Meanwhile, *Itaewon Class* doesn't hold back when addressing mental health concerns and how they impact us. It sensitively and honestly portrays the characters' battles with trauma, depression, and anxiety, increasing audience awareness nurturing empathy, and encouraging candid discussions about mental wellness.

Itaewon Class is what I think, defies preconceptions in ways that go beyond the traditional narrative of K-dramas. It is akin to a catalyst for innovation in Korean entertainment since it openly covers significant societal topics like rethinking conventional gender roles, discussing LGBTQIA+ issues, and spotlighting the sufferings of the disadvantaged. With their varied histories and experiences, it introduces us to a broad spectrum of people. It highlights the richness and diversity of human existence through stories ranging from that of a transgender chef fighting for acceptance to an ambitious female entrepreneur, shattering stereotypes.



ITAEWON CLASS LOOKS AT THE INTERSECTIONALITY OF IDENTITIES, ACKNOWLEDGING THAT ONE'S IDENTITY MAY HAVE MULTIPLE ASPECTS OF DIVERSITY AND CHOICE.

The fashion trends portrayed in the series have been embraced by fans thanks to the cultural phenomenon that *Itaewon Class* has sparked. Fashion aficionados find inspiration in the characters' wardrobe choices, which range from eye-catching streetwear to statement accessories. Also, there has been renewed interest in the drama's vivid Itaewon area. Itaewon has blossomed into a center for cultural discovery for both residents and visitors, with hip cafes and distinct stores.

Itaewon Class is essentially more than just a K-drama; it's an icon that has had an ongoing impact on Korean popular culture. By questioning prejudices, promoting inclusivity, and inspiring creativity, *Itaewon Class* has set a new standard for Korean dramas, encouraging the industry to embrace diversity and tell stories that resonate with a global audience.

I love *Itaewon Class* for its stunning cinematography and attention to detail. The vibrant and bustling streets of Itaewon are beautifully captured, creating a dynamic backdrop for the story to unfold. As the camera pans across its colorful streets, a visual feast emerges—the essence of the neighborhood and its unique blend of cultures and diversity. From the neon lights illuminating the night sky to the intricate graffiti on the walls, Itaewon's aesthetics are well portrayed.

Scenes are aptly designed to reflect the characters' personalities and emotions, creating a visually engaging narrative. The visual layout gives the plot additional texture and variety, whether it's the slick and contemporary headquarters of a large firm or the jagged interior of a tiny bistro.

Complementing the visual elements, *Itaewon Class* boasts a lit OST that intensifies the emotions expressed in each scene, encasing the core of the protagonists' journeys. Gaho's "Start Over" remains my favorite from the album. It gives you the impression that you are sprinting with every ounce of yourself toward your goal. Particularly in the chorus sections, which reinforce the core of the song, Gaho's impassioned voice, verse, rhythm, and music are alive and kicking. Sae-ro-yi's yearning for a better life and the other characters' quest for freedom while preserving their values in an unjust environment are both beautifully conveyed in the song.

Itaewon Class is the exploration of social inequality. It sheds light on the injustices faced by those on the fringes of society and raises awareness about the importance of empathy and understanding. It encourages us for a more equal and inclusive world. It highlights the stark contrast between the haves and the have-nots. Through their experiences, we are exposed to the harsh realities of discrimination, prejudice, and the limited opportunities available to those who are deemed different.

Itaewon Class delves into the complexities of this issue, exploring the underlying factors that perpetuate such disparities. It prompts us to question the systems and structures that contribute to social inequality, urging them to challenge and dismantle these barriers.

Itaewon Class celebrates diversity with characters from different cultural and ethnic backgrounds and sexual orientations. The drama defies biases and builds a deeper sense of acceptance by depicting a realistic and inclusive representation of society. *Itaewon Class* is an important reminder of the power of diversity and inclusion in storytelling.

Different people who infringe on the standards of society are found amidst the lively streets of Itaewon, a melting pot of cultures. The drama is an excellent expression of their different perspectives and lives. *Itaewon Class* underlines the power that comes from unity in diversity and stresses the value of embracing and appreciating these differences.

Itaewon Class looks at the intersectionality of identities, acknowledging that one's identity may have multiple aspects of diversity and choice. It digs into the specifics of these intersections, bringing clarity to the issues people run into when navigating multiple marginalized identities. By doing so, *Itaewon Class* deepens its portrayal of diversity while remaining authentic and nuanced. It's a beautiful, universal story that might be both yours and mine.

BLACKSWAN *in* CONVERSATION

BLACKSWAN REVEALS THEIR EXCITEMENT ABOUT COMING BACK TO INDIA, NOTABLY PERFORMING FOR THE K-TOWN FESTIVAL IN MUMBAI, AND MORE CANDID THOUGHTS IN THE FOLLOWING INTERVIEW

By **DEBASHREE DUTTA**

COURTESY OF DR MUSIC

FATOU, NVEE, GABI, AND S RIYA'S BLACKSWAN have diverse roots and a distinct vision. The economic premise of "the black swan theory," which holds that the improbable has happened, is where "BLACKSWAN" originates. In tandem, the girl group unites members from different countries with a shared objective: becoming the best idols in the world. "I see us getting very big and reaching a huge amount of people through our music," band leader and rapper Fatou says, also letting out, "I want us to be perceived as human beings who gave their all for their dreams."

Following those dreams, breaking through in K-pop, and eventually becoming an idol—it's a progressive realization of a worthwhile dream. For Senegalese-Belgian Fatou, she has loved music since she was born. "I used to dance and sing for family relatives whenever they came to our house. So, I knew since I was like five that I had to do music; there was no way I was going to do something else," she says, and then at 15, she was introduced to K-pop.

NVee was originally going to school in the U.S. to become a singer-actor. But at one point, she felt as though she wasn't in the right place. That's when K-pop took over her life; she vowed to make it as a K-pop idol above every roadblock, no matter how challenging or long the journey was going to be. In her words, "It took me about two years of auditions until I was finally accepted, and here I am sticking to my word and living my dream for real."

"Music has always been a big part of my life," recalls Brazilian-German Gabi who was floored by K-pop in 2016, and how proficiently artists were performing

simultaneously difficult songs and choreographies while still putting on impressive acts. The singer subsequently went to South Korea for dance and vocal training after qualifying for their company's (DR Music) audition in 2021.

"Since my debut with BLACKSWAN's comeback, *That Karma*, I have been dedicating myself more every day to bring a better performance to our fans, Luminas, and inspire and show more people around the world that if you have a dream and want to make it come true, with effort and dedication, anything is possible," Gabi adds.

On the other side of the world, an Indian Sriya was dreaming of being an artist. "Four years ago, I fell in love with K-pop. I was amazed by the music and performances of the artists," notes the 20-year-old singer and dancer. She was dreaming about becoming an idol, "but back then it was not that easy." There were many highs and lows thereby, but her family kept cheering her on, to the point where she is living her dreams today.

Last year, the band released their EP *That Karma*, featuring the lead single "Karma" with an eclectic music video shot in Odisha, incidentally, Sriya's hometown. Those were memorable experiences—perhaps they tie them to India. And back for the K-Town Festival this year, the group is looking forward to some fresh ones. As NVee expresses, "We are so happy to come back to India to celebrate and perform again. We have missed India and have been wanting to go back for a long time."

BLACKSWAN, in my mind, stands for an admirable goal and the process of pursuing it. As they necessitate chances and means that we seldom have, our goals usually run counter to the reality around us. Even so, they are still doable, as the quartet confirms, as does their music, which firmly embodies their sense of self and a will "to never give up."

The edited excerpts below offer more details on this dynamic, one-of-a-kind act, the music they produce, their innermost thoughts, and how they plan to become more of who they want to be.

What specific elements does BLACKSWAN hope to draw attention to at the show?

Fatou: Our charismatic and down-to-earth personalities. We would like to show you our human side!

NVee: As a group, it'll be our second time coming back to India. So, we are excited to see our Indian Luminas again. As well as showcase what BLACKSWAN can do.

Gabi: We want to show our singing and dancing skills, but mainly our harmony as a group and energy on stage. We want to connect with the public and create good moments together.

Sriya: We want to give our best and leave an impact on the audience and also enjoy and have fun with our Luminas.

For Sriya, it's a homecoming, what else?

Sriya: I feel great to go back, I missed my country so much and the food and especially my family. I'm glad to visit again and I'm so excited about everything.

What are your fondest memories from the "Karma" shoot?

Fatou: For me, it was when we were all tired but we kept it together and pulled through the shoot and finished it successfully. That made me trust the members even more.

NVee: My favorite memory from was the last day of shooting we shot early in the morning with the sunrise at the most beautiful peaceful temple. With an amazing view of Odisha.

Gabi: For sure my stay in India, I remember waking up every morning and going directly to the breakfast in the hotel to eat Indian food.

Sriya: Shooting in India, especially in my hometown was the most memorable thing ever for me. Watching my members wearing Indian clothes and accessories was the most beautiful memory for me.

Are you going to be sticking around here for a while after the show, perhaps for a quick getaway?

Fatou: Sadly, not this time because we have a lot to prepare for, please keep an eye out for that!

NVee: Sadly, we won't be able to stick around longer. We really would love to go sightseeing and eat more amazing delicious food but we must head back to Korea to prepare for our upcoming comeback. But next time we are back we are hoping we get to stay longer.

Gabi: We are going to stay just a few days more, so I hope we can see more places in India.

Sriya: - I'm planning to take them around since it's also my first time in Mumbai so I'm hoping that we get some time to look around and see the monuments and all.

What is the core of BLACKSWAN's sound?

Fatou: The sound of strength and hope.

NVee: The Core of BLACKSWAN's sound is Confidence and it's Powerful.

Is it challenging for a multinational girl group to truly stand out in K-pop?

Fatou: Not really in my opinion, because we have such a different and eye-catching charm.

NVee: It's not hard. I believe that as long as we stick to our style and sound and keep working hard to do better, everything else will fall into place.

Sriya: Not that much as we thought it would be but as long as you hold a unique side and talent and do hard work it can be possible.

How has the artistic component of your work evolved?

Fatou: I pay way more attention to little details like how we pronounce words and the accents we put in the rhythm while singing, so it made me have a broader look and made me have a better ear in general when it comes to music in all its forms.

Your songs, I'm sure, speak more to your identity as BLACKSWAN. What do you want to get across through your music?

Fatou: To never give up! And we women have power!

NVee: I want our music to not only show who we are as individuals but to show across the world, that you can be confident in expressing who you are and where you are from in every aspect.

Gabi: We want the people to get connected and feel the music. We want to make music that has a lot of messages and meanings that people can relate to their life experiences. Everyone has their own stories. I hope when they look up to us, they can see themselves in each one of us. We are all different, and that difference is what makes us unique.

What is the most fulfilling aspect of being a K-pop idol? What is the most difficult part?

Fatou: The most fulfilling part is being able to live breathe eat music, and connect with Luminas!

The most difficult part is being away from my family.

Gabi: Meeting our Luminas and interacting with them is certainly the best part! We received a lot of love from them and we know that everything we do today is only possible because of them. They make us want to keep going even in the most difficult times.

The hardest part is certainly staying away from our home country for a long time, anxiously waiting to reunite with our families.

Where do you see yourself in the ensuing years, and how do you want the world to perceive BLACKSWAN?

Fatou: I see us getting very big, and reaching a huge amount of people through our music. I want us to be perceived as human beings who gave their all for their dreams.

Sriya: I want BLACKSWAN to be remembered as a legend. BLACKSWAN wants to be the group that is good at everything. Whoever looks up to us, they'll see themselves in us.

Tell us about your upcoming initiatives

Fatou: New music!

NVee: We plan to release a lot more music that represents each of our cultures because we all come from different backgrounds. There are never-ending ideas that we can create for new music, concepts, and fusions. So, look forward to that. We are also having a lot more world tours so we can meet our fans around the world.

Sriya: There's going to be a lot of surprises and things that no one expected. We have been preparing for our next comeback, so please look forward to it.

Anything else you want to add?

Fatou: I hope we have a lot of fun together in Mumbai! And I hope next time we come we can meet more of you in different parts of India.

NVee: We are very thankful for this opportunity and are excited for more opportunities to come back again in the future!

Sriya: Thank you to the Luminas who have been supporting and loving us. We can't wait to see you and have fun.

THE LEGEND AND HIS RHYTHM, IN FIVE TABLA MOVEMENTS

He will turn 73 this month and he has just won three Grammys. But that is not going to slow down the maestro. Ustad Zakir Hussain is as busy with his Hindustani classical and fusion projects as he was when he started his career nearly six decades ago

BY NARENDRA KUSNUR

PHOTOGRAPHER: THE DARK ENTITY

MOVEMENT 1 –

THEKA

For tabla virtuoso Ustad Zakir Hussain, who will turn 73 this month, the decision to attend the Grammy awards ceremony in Los Angeles on February 4th was taken at the last minute. Both he and guitarist John McLaughlin, who had co-founded the Indo-jazz fusion group Shakti in 1973, had other commitments. Hussain managed to juggle his schedule and was delighted to be present at the prestigious event.

The new Shakti album This Moment went on to win the Best Global Music Album award. Hussain won two other Grammys for the album As We Speak, featuring banjo player Bela Fleck, bassist Edgar Meyer and flautist Rakesh Chaurasia. It won the Best Global Music Performance award for the song "Pashto," and the Best Contemporary Instrumental Album. He thus became the first Indian artiste to pick up three Grammys on a single night. He had earlier played an active part in the Grammy-winning albums Planet Drum (1991) and Global Drum Project (2008), spearheaded by Mickey Hart, drummer of rock band Grateful Dead.

Interestingly, because of an unexpected development, the Padma Vibhushan recipient could not personally collect the Shakti award. He explains, "The award for 'Pashto' was announced first. I wasn't expecting it at all, and since I hadn't prepared a thank you speech, I ended up mumbling something randomly. Bela couldn't attend the ceremony and as per the procedure, Edgar, Rakesh, and I went backstage to give bytes to the media. While that was happening, the Shakti award was announced, and I was clueless. It was only befitting that the younger generation of Shakti musicians – vocalist Shankar Mahadevan, violinist Ganesh Rajagopalan and kanjira player V. Selvaganesh – collected the award."

The Shakti award comes after the group completed its 50th anniversary tour, covering India, the U.S. and Europe. Hussain says this recognition was well-deserved, considering that it was Shakti's first studio album after 46 years. "When we released A Handful Of Beauty and Natural Elements in the 1970s, the category of World Music didn't exist. When we came back in the 1990s as Remember Shakti, we focused on live performances. The new album just happened when all of us were in different places during the pandemic and wanted to create something new. There has been a huge change in the content, with more vocals now," he says.

Last year also marked 50 years since Hussain worked on ex-Beatle George Harrison's album Living In The Material World. Declares Hussain, "I have always believed that Shakti and the George Harrison album, along with the Taj Mahal Tea ad, played a major role in expanding my audience."

Shakti - Zakir Hussain, Shankar Mahadevan, John McLaughlin, Ganesh Rajagopalan and V. Selvaganesh.

COURTESY OF THE ARTIST; ANDREW PUTLER/REDFERNS/GETTY IMAGES

Zakir Hussain with Shakti at the 1976 Montreux Festival in Switzerland.

MOVEMENT 2 –

PESHKAR

Zakir Hussain during John McLaughlin in the Remember Shakti concert in 2005 at Tokyo Opera City Concert Hall in Tokyo.

PHOTO BY JUN SATO/WIREIMAGE/GETTY IMAGES

Over the years, Hussain has been known to maintain a balance between traditional music and experimentation. Besides his father, the list of legends he has accompanied on stage over the last five decades reads like a who's who of Indian classical music — Pandit Ravi Shankar, sarod masters Ustad Ali Akbar Khan and Ustad Amjad Ali Khan, santoor great Pt Shivkumar Sharma, flautist Pt Hariprasad Chaurasia, vocalists Pandit Jasraj, w and dozens of others both from Hindustani and Carnatic streams. He also accompanied Kathak legend Pt Birju Maharaj and thumri doyenne Shobha Gurtu. Besides the sheer brilliance of his playing, his charisma and stage presence has ensured that he is the best known of the living tabla maestros. Besides the traditional rhythmic patterns of the Punjab gharana which he represents, his stage performances are often punctuated with a display of spontaneous sense of humor. He would sometimes play popular pieces like "Doe A Deer," "Smoke On The Water" and "Ek Do Teen," and even replicate the sound of horses or railway trains.

Born on March 9th, 1951, the eldest son of legendary tabla maestro Ustad Alla Rakha and Bavi Begum began learning the instrument from a very early age. He has often told the story about the basic rhythm of the tabla being the first words his legendary father whispered into his ears when he was first brought home after birth by his mother. The name Zakir refers to someone performing zikr, a form of devotion that involves rhythmically repeating Allah's name. The family name was Qureshi, and the young lad grew up in Mahim, Mumbai, where he attended St Michael's School. Early mornings were spent learning and practicing rhythmic syllables or bols.

A child prodigy, Hussain started touring when he was 12. By the time he was in his mid-teens, the following for Indian music had increased considerably in the West, thanks to Pt Ravi Shankar and Ustad Ali Akbar Khan. On tours, they were accompanied on tabla by Ustad Alla Rakha and Pandit Chatur Lal, who passed away in 1965.

In 1968, Ravi Shankar won the Best Chamber Music Performance award for West Meets East, his collaboration with violinist Yehudi Menuhin. For his part, Alla Rakha collaborated with American jazz drummer Buddy Rich on the album Rich A La Rakha. These projects opened the possibility of Indian musicians collaborating with western artists.

With sitar players Harihar Rao and Ananda Shankar, and jazz players John Henry Mayer, John Handy and Joe Harriott fusing Indian music with jazz and orchestral music, the stage had been set for Indo-fusion. This genre was inspired by jazz-rock fusion, which had become popular among younger listeners.

It was around this time that McLaughlin first met Hussain in New York, in 1969. Mclaughlin was already famous by then as one of the most proficient jazz guitarists in the business, having played alongside the likes of Miles Davis, Wayne Shorter, Larry Coryell, Jaco Pastorius as well as rock greats like Carlos Santana, Jimi Hendrix, the Rolling Stones etc. He would also become famous in the 1970s for getting together two pioneering jazz fusion bands around that time— the Mahavishnu Orchestra with Jerry Goodman, Jan Hammer, Rick Laird and Billy Cobham; and the lesser-known Trio of Doom with Tony Williams and Jaco Pastorius.

In 1970, Mclaughlin met spiritual leader Sri Chinmoy which led to his deepening interest in Indian classical music. He and Hussain played together for the first time in 1972 at the house of Ustad Ali Akbar Khan in California. The guitarist also met violinist L Shankar a few months later, which resulted in the idea of forming Shakti, with Vikku Vinayakram joining on ghatam. Mridangam exponent Ramnad Raghavan accompanied them on two shows. Hussain recalls, "Meeting John ji was a pivotal moment in my life, him accepting me as a colleague was a milestone moment for me. It was indeed the time when everything changed going forward for me."

Shakti became a resounding success. However, because each musician had other commitments, they toured only at certain times of the year. Says Hussain, "That made it a bit easier for me to balance my teaching assignment at the Ali Akbar College in San Francisco. I was also playing concerts with Khansaheb and he was concerned, as were my father and Ravi Shankar ji, that I would neglect my classical performances. But I was very focused on keeping my Indian classical life in the forefront. It was also helpful that Shakti did not tour India when it was first formed."

It would be 1982 when Shakti first came to India, that too with guitarist Larry Coryell, filling in for McLaughlin who had an injured hand. A second tour came soon after, in 1984 with Mclaughlin back in the band. It was a massive success, and attracted many new fans here. However, the quartet stopped playing in the mid-1980s when Vinayakram had to manage his father's school in Chennai, and Shankar got involved in other projects.

They were to return as Remember Shakti in 1997, with flautist Pt Hariprasad Chaurasia and saxophonist Bendik Hofseth coming in place of Shankar. Later, mandolin wizard U. Srinivas, Selvaganesh and Mahadevan were to join McLaughlin and Hussain. Their album Saturday Night In Bombay, recorded live at the erstwhile Rang Bhavan in 2000, was a fan's delight.

Hussain always had a Carnatic percussionist for company in Shakti, first in the form of Vinayakram, then Selvaganesh. As he says, "That was an advantage, as I did not have to radically alter my thinking process. Vikku ji was fabulous to work with, and there was no divide or fences from the very first day. I learnt a lot of taal vidya from the great man. In the early days, John ji and Shankar would allow me and Vikku ji to come up with the rhythmic element to support the compositions, and we thought of korvais and rhythmic transitions which John ji would incorporate. Playing with Selva bhai was great fun too. He had grown up on Shakti and is an extension of Vikku ji. That works perfectly."

His work with Carnatic musicians have extended beyond Shakti in recent times. A few years ago, he teamed up with violinist Kala Ramnath and veena exponent Jayanthi Kumaresh to successfully tour around the world as Triveni.

MOVEMENT 3 -

SAWAAL-JAWAAB

The Remember Shakti concert in 2005 in Tokyo.

HUSSAIN'S DESIRE to experiment led to various other projects. He contributed to albums by Irish singer Van Morrison and the group Earth Wind & Fire, and formed the Diga Rhythm Band with Mickey Hart, which also included the legendary Grateful Dead guitarist Jerry Garcia on two songs "Rasooli" and "Happiness Is Drumming." Hussain's 1986 album Making Music featured McLaughlin, Chaurasia, and Norwegian saxophonist Jan Garbarek. It contained a tune called "Zakir," co-written by McLaughlin. In 1990, he was part of Hart's project Planet Drum, along with Vinayakram, Sikiru Adepoju and Babatunde Olatunji of Nigeria, Giovanni Hidalgo and Frank Colon of Puerto Rico, and Brazilian percussionist Airto Moreira and his wife Flora Purim.

Little known is the fact that he occasionally ventured into acting — in James Ivory's Heat & Dust (1983) and Sai Paranjpye's Saaz (1997). Hussain has recently spoken about the fact that in the late 1950s, on the suggestion of Dilip Kumar, he was offered the role of the young Prince Salim in Mughal-e-Azam by director K. Asif. But the potential film debut never materialized because his father objected, saying that he will only be a musician. His most famous celluloid appearance of course has been the long-running Taj Mahal Tea commercial, which made 'Wah Taj!' a household catchphrase.

Hussain has also composed for Aparna Sen's Mr & Mrs Iyer. Thematic albums like Soundscapes: Music Of The Deserts and The Elements: Space expanded his repertoire, and collaborations with guitarist Pat Martino, saxophonists Charles Lloyd, Chris Potter and George Brooks, and bassist Dave Holland lent more variety to his playing. He even did a guest appearance with ace keyboardist Joe Zawinul's Syndicate at Rang Bhavan in 1997.

In the late 1990s, the Asian Underground movement had picked up in the U.K., where young musicians created songs blending Asian flavors with modern electronic music. In keeping with the trend, Hussain joined producer Bill Laswell on the project Tabla Beat Science, blending Indian percussion with Asian Underground, drum and bass and electronica. At the other end of the spectrum, he was commissioned by the National Centre for the Performing Arts' (NCPA's) Symphony Orchestra of India (SOI) in 2015 to compose the Peshkar Concerto for Tabla & Orchestra, conducted by Zane Dalal. Last year, he composed the Triple Concerto for Tabla, Sitar and Flute, with Niladri Kumar and Rakesh Chaurasia as soloists, with Alpesh Chauhan conducting the SOI in the opening shows.

According to Hussain, composing a piece with a western classical orchestra in mind requires a completely different mindset. "It's a different ceiling. One has to adapt to the rules of their playing, their dos and don'ts, while maintaining the Indian classical form," he says. Hussain adds, "Moreover, being a percussionist has its own challenges as normally a melody instrument is used. But in Peshkar, I used the same concept I use in my solo performances. The Triple Concerto is based on the concept of canon."

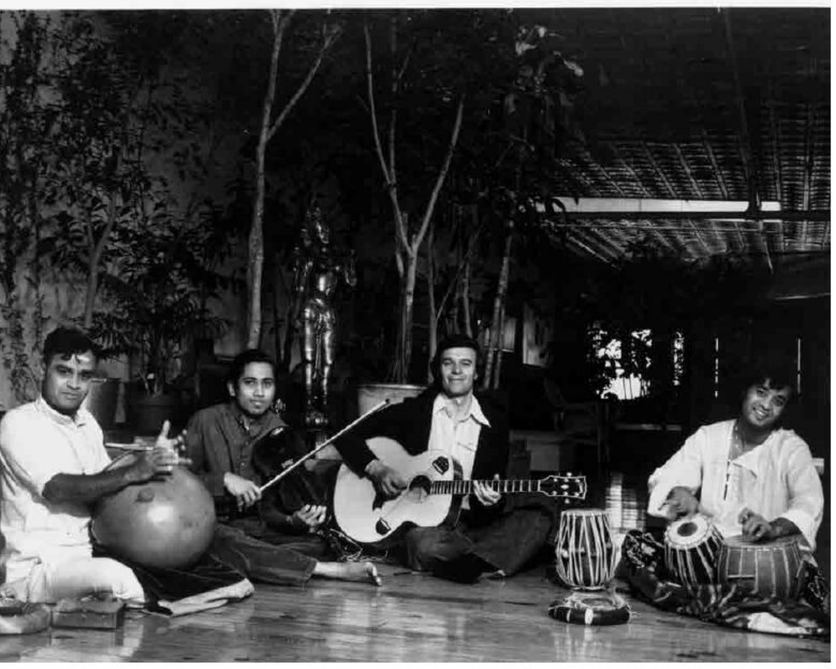
In global fusion, Hussain has performed often with Fleck and Meyer, and they even performed at the Barsi concert in Mumbai, held annually as a homage to Ustad Alla Rakha. "We did the album The Melody Of Rhythm in 2009. For the new album, Rakesh Chaurasia joined us. 'Pashto,' which got the award, is inspired by a British military tune in the North-West Frontier Province of India played by both marching soldiers and Indian musicians," says Hussain.

PHOTO BY JUN SATO/WIREIMAGE/GETTY IMAGES

MOVEMENT 4 -

KAAYDA

Shakti, circa 1970.



WHILE HIS FATHER was the among the first to introduce the tabla to the European and American audience, mesmerising them with his unparalleled wizardry, Hussain has over the years taken that work forward. In the manner what Ravi Shankar has done for the sitar, he has helped popularize the Indian percussion instrument across at least two generation of audiences around the world. Though he grew up in an era that had many brilliant tabla artistes like Anindo Chatterjee, the late Shafaat Ahmed Khan, Kumar Bose, and Swapan Chaudhuri, he has created a new audience through innovations and collaborations. His younger brother Fazal Qureshi took to the tabla too, and now trains students at the Ustad Alla Rakha Institute of Music. The third brother Taufiq Qureshi has adapted the African djembe to the Indian style and has done some amazing live shows.

According to Hussain, today's young generation has a lot more tabla players, because there are more avenues to learn. "I see some of these youngsters and looking at their speed and accuracy, my jaw drops," he says. "Today's tabla players have all the information from a much earlier age. Because of technology, young players have access to different techniques which took people from my generation a longer time to figure out. Yet, one must master the traditional style first, because they are the roots of more modern styles. The same is the case with both western and Indian classical music. Only if you know the traditional form, you can do film music, ghazal, fusion," he adds.

The maestro says that as tabla artistes, the main role is that of being an accompanist. "I see many youngsters wanting to get straight into solo concerts, but they should be able to play with different formats. Within classical music there are different layers. Playing with a vocalist has one style, playing with a sitar player another, and along with santoor or bansuri requires a completely different skill set. So, besides the tabla, one should get into intricacies of other instruments, or even how dance forms or vocal styles like thumri or ghazal are performed. One also needs to know the components of an orchestra," he adds.

MICHAEL OCHS ARCHIVES/GETTY IMAGES

MOVEMENT 5 –
TIHAI

HUSSAIN POINTS out that besides his father – who passed away in February 2000 – and McLaughlin, he has had great times with Pandit Shivkumar Sharma, Pandit Hariprasad Chaurasia and sarangi maestro Ustad Sultan Khan. "My father always insisted on the importance of being a good student. The moment you decide you are a maestro or an Ustad, you are distancing yourself from the others. You have to be part of a group, and not dominate it," he points out.

Talking of his special bond with Shivkumar Sharma, who passed away in May 2022, Hussain says, "We played hundreds of concerts, and had hundreds of conversations, that extended from music to spirituality and history to politics and whatever. After he passed away, I have done a few shows with his son Rahul Sharma, and certain stage mannerisms and playing techniques of Rahul remind me of Shiv ji, making me look towards the sky and ask for Shiv ji's blessings. When I play with younger artistes like Niladri, Rakesh and Rahul, there are many things I gain from the interaction. They also have an understanding of how the western system functions."

Zakir Hussain along with violinist Kala Ramnath and Veena Exponent Jayanthi Kumaresh during 42nd Gunidas Sangeet Sammelan in Mumbai, India in 2018.

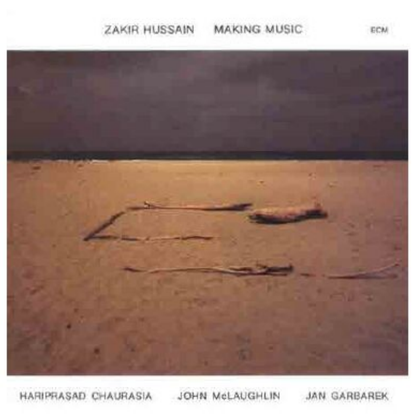
PRATIK CHORGE/HINDUSTAN TIMES/GETTY IMAGES

10 Albums to Appreciate the Wide Canvas of Zakir Hussain's Virtuosity

It would require a full shelf of albums to capture Ustad Zakir Hussain's skill across genres. Here's our pick of 10 albums from his large body of work, a selection that comes closest to doing that. All of them are available widely on streaming platforms

1 SHAKTI –

Natural Elements (1977, Sony Music, Indo-fusion): The last of the Shakti albums featuring the original line-up, this one had great tracks like "Mind Ecology," "Face To Face" and "Bridge Of Sighs."

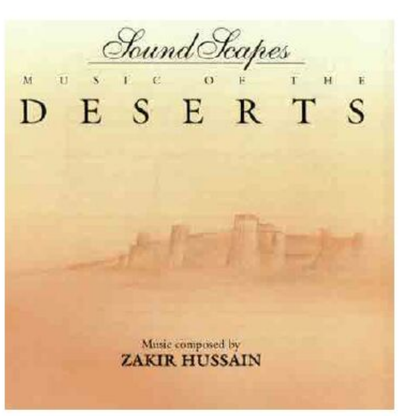


2 ZAKIR HUSSAIN –

Making Music (1986, ECM Records, Indo-fusion): Hussain and guitarist John McLaughlin were joined by flautist Hariprasad Chaurasia and Norwegian saxophonist Jan Garbarek.

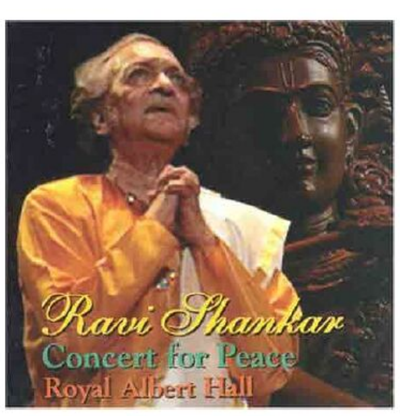
3 MICKEY HART & OTHERS –

Planet Drum (1991, 360 Degrees Productions, world music): An effort to fuse drumming styles from various regions, the album featured known percussionists from the U.S., India, Nigeria, Brazil and Puerto Rico, among others.



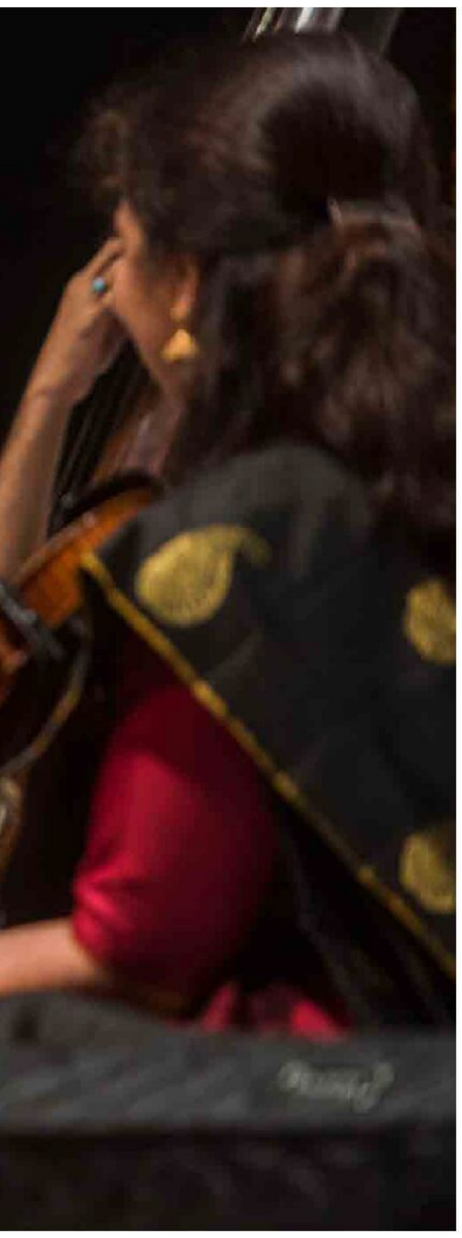
4 SOUNDSCAPES –

Music Of The Deserts (1993, Music Today, ambient): Hussain composed six tunes inspired by desert regions, using subjects like sandstorms and nomads.



5 RAVI SHANKAR –

Concert For Peace (1995, Moment Records, Hindustani classical): Sitar legend Ravi Shankar was joined by Hussain and sarod player Partho Sarathy in this legendary concert at London's Royal Albert Hall.



Shakti, winners of the Global Music Album award for 'This Moment' at the 66th GRAMMY Awards in 2024 in Los Angeles.

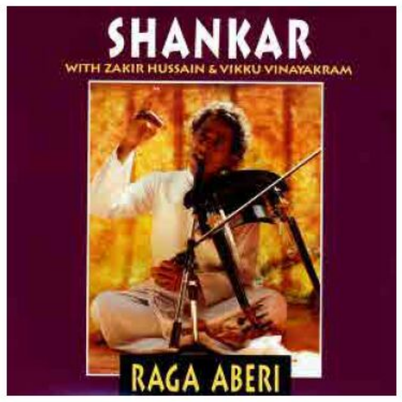
Bela Fleck (L) and Zakir Hussain perform at the Brown Theatre in 2009 in Louisville, Kentucky.

Asked what advice he would give to the younger generation; Hussain cites three things. "The first is to take pride in what one does, and not to think of tabla playing as a chore or a kind of job. Secondly, listen to everything. Having an open ear helps one discover things much more easily. Finally, one has to move with the times, and keep oneself relevant. I myself wouldn't like to be called a relic."

The tabla maestro is now looking forward to some exciting projects this year. "After the Grammys, I returned to do some concerts in Mumbai, Pune, and Bengaluru. It's heartening to see packed halls where I play. I think there has been a listening renaissance all over the world. Today, people like to go out, and attending music programmes is part of their plan," he says.

Lined up this year are an As We Speak tour, and multiple concerts with sarangi player Sabir Khan and flautist Debopriya Chatterjee. He is also writing some music for the Third Coast Percussion Ensemble of the U.S. "That's another challenge, as besides regular percussion instruments, I will be composing for xylophones and vibraphones. I have received some offers to write for films, but things are yet to be finalized." Clearly, Hussain seems to be enjoying every bit of the action. For thousands of fans, there's never a shortage of surprises. The beat goes on.

EMMA MCINTYRE/GETTY IMAGES FOR THE RECORDING ACADEMY; STEPHEN J. COHEN/FILMMAGIC/GETTY IMAGES



6 L SHANKAR –

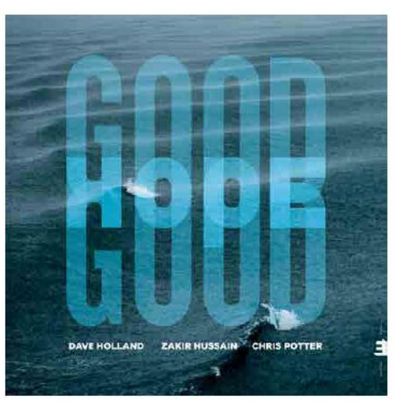
Raga Aberi (1995, The Orchard, Carnatic): L Shankar played the 10-stringed double violin on this album also featuring Hussain and ghatam maestro Vikku Vinayakram.

7 SHIVKUMAR SHARMA, RAHUL SHARMA & ZAKIR HUSSAIN –

Santoor Viraasat (1998, Ninaad Music, Hindustani classical): A recording of the first-ever concert by Shivkumar Sharma and his son Rahul, held at Mumbai's Nehru Centre.

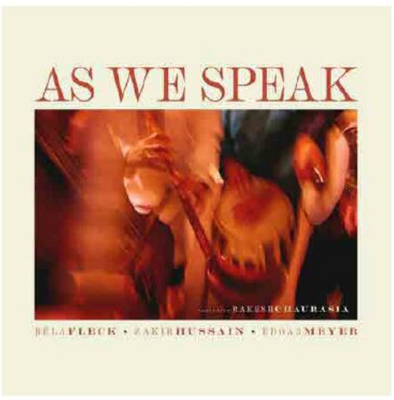
8 TABLA BEAT SCIENCE –

Tala Matrix (2000, Palm Pictures, electronica): A heady blend of Indian percussion, Asian underground, drum and bass and electronica, it was spearheaded by Hussain and bassist-producer Bill Laswell.



9 DAVE HOLLAND, HUSSAIN AND CHRIS POTTER –

Good Hope (2019, Edition Records, jazz/ global fusion): Bassist Dave Holland and saxophonist Chris Potter teamed up with Hussain to form the Crosscurrents Trio. The album has a track "J Bhai" dedicated to McLaughlin.



10 BELA FLECK, EDGAR MEYER & HUSSAIN WITH RAKESH CHAURASIA –

As We Speak (2023, Bela Fleck Productions, global fusion): Flautist Rakesh Chaurasia was added to the group of banjo player Bela Fleck, bassist Edgar Meyer and Hussain on this double Grammy winning album.

Anitta's Funk Revolution

After a major health scare, the Brazilian star learned to let go and got back to her roots

BY JULYSSA LOPEZ
PHOTOGRAPHS BY LUCAS BORI

Anitta at her home in Brazil in December

Anitta's Funk Revolution

LAST NOVEMBER, just before the Latin Grammys in Seville, Spain, a crowd huddled in front of a club called Sala Cosmos, where the Brazilian superstar Anitta was co-hosting a massive party with Instagram. It got *too* massive: The venue was at full capacity, but that didn't stop people from shoving toward the door, eager to get in. Some of them spilled onto the sidewalk, dancing to the muffled, breakneck Brazilian funk beats echoing from the DJ booth.

Inside, Anitta was the life of the party, ass up and twerking on the dance floor in a highlighter-bright green-and-yellow dress. Stars like hip-hop legend DJ Premier and the Colombian pop band Morat milled about, while Anitta's dancers, nearly all of them Brazilian, backed her up. The DJ spun track after track, each moment a showcase of propulsive, hyper-energetic Brazilian funk, mirroring the parties in Rio where this voltaic blend of hip-hop, African rhythms, and electronic music is played. These days, Brazilian funk (also known as funk carioca or baile funk) is bigger than ever, spawning TikTok dance challenges and full-on choreography. Anitta and her friends threw themselves into the moves — a particularly complex sequence involved push-ups. At one point, Ovy on the Drums, the producer known for making hits with Karol G, came up and told her that to keep up, "*uno tiene que ser atleta*" — "you have to be an athlete."

Late into the night, someone on Anitta's team told her she could go home if she wanted. "I was like, 'I'm already drunk! Why am I going to leave?'" She ended up being one of the last people standing, shutting down the club. "It was like 3 a.m., and they were like, 'OK, they need to close the venue.' I was like, 'Where's the afterparty?'" she says. "I said, 'I'm only leaving when I'm kicked out,' and I got kicked out."

None of this is a big surprise: Anitta has built a brand as a bright, brazen human firework with a supremely dedicated global fan base. At 30, she's a trilingual triple threat, with chart-toppers in English, Spanish, and Portuguese, and her splashy reggaeton and pop hits have helped earn her a Grammy nomination and even a Guinness World Record. "I'm sorry for others, but I think I'm the person who knows *the most* how to do a party," she jokes the next morning, a mischievous smirk on her face.

As she says this, she's sitting in the lobby of her hotel in Seville. You can't tell she's been up all night: She's wearing a white crop top and a crisp black skirt, her red hair in neat, casual waves. Because Spain is hosting the Latin Grammys, the week has been packed with flamenco showcases and Spanish performances, which makes Anitta's event seem even more bold: Only she'd have the guts to throw a gigantic baile-funk bash in the middle of everything.

To her, it was an opportunity to demand attention for Brazil, a country that's frequently and unfairly overlooked in the Latin-music industry because of the differences in language and culture. "This party and things like that help people understand my environment," she says. And it's part of a much bigger plan. Later this year, Anitta will release a Brazilian-funk album she hopes will bring more people to the music that brought her up. "I was born and raised in the communities of Brazil, of Rio, and these are the places that Brazilian funk originally comes from," she explains. "This was always my reality."

The music made her a breakout star in Brazil. Anitta, whose real name is Larissa de Macedo Machado, comes from Honório Gurgel, a working-class neighborhood in Rio de Janeiro. In 2010, she teamed up with funk-carioca producer Batutinha and signed to a funk label called Furacão. By then, Brazilian funk was already an underground sensation, a result of DJs throwing huge parties that drew from funk and hip-hop in primarily Black favelas during the Seventies and Eighties. Later, in the Nineties, DJs began incorporating freestyle records flown in from Miami, amping the music with offbeat electronic influences.

Brazilian-funk DJ Rodrigo Gorky, who worked on Anitta's upcoming album, says that he used to refer to the music as "Miami bass on steroids." "Now, it's a complete thing of its own," he says. The genre has shot

HAIR AND MAKEUP BY KRISNA. STYLING BY DANIEL UEDA. SWIMSUIT BY AMIR SLAMA. HAIR AND MAKEUP ASSISTANT: FELIPE CARMO. STYLING ASSISTANCE BY GUILHERME HIGASHIZIMA, HUGO MACHADO, AND HENRIQUE SCA. PHOTO ASSISTANCE BY GUTO BROWN. RETOUCHING BY JUNIOR REIS.

off into all directions, from tech house to Afrofuturism. Anitta played a special role in its growth, adding a more commercial, pop-focused twist throughout her career. But while she's never abandoned Brazilian sounds, she'd been busy scoring hits in other genres.

Then, last summer, she dropped the EP *Funk Generation: A Favela Story,* along with videos that capture life in Rio. It was the first sign that she was turning back to her roots in a profound way, and there are deeply personal reasons for that: Anitta's been through a lot over the past couple of years, including a cancer scare in 2022. "I was thinking I was going to die," she says. "And I said, 'You know what? I'm going to do an album for myself in case it's the last thing I do — not worrying about what's going to happen after the album, not worrying about if the album is going to be good, if people are going to like it, if it's going to be on the charts.'" Over the next year, Anitta overhauled her management and label teams, moves that positioned her to pursue the album.

She knows that making a Brazilian-funk album — especially when people are used to hearing her work in more mainstream genres — isn't an easy task. Brazilian funk has continued to grow in the pop world, attracting interest from stars like Rauw Alejandro and Cardi B. But it hasn't gotten its due at a global level. Gorky says if anyone can make it an international phenomenon, it's Anitta. "There's no one better than her to represent all this," he says.

"To be the pioneers is very hard because you're doing something nobody has done, so you don't have an example to follow," she explains. "You need to trust your gut, your feelings, and your intuition."

Anitta started thinking about the new album when she was in the hospital. She says that in 2022, she had major autoimmune issues while suffering a series of misdiagnoses. (She had surgery for endometriosis that summer, and that December had to cancel a public appearance because she was admitted to a hospital in São Paulo.) At one point, the situation turned into a full-blown cancer scare. She went through tests and treatments for five months, somehow keeping it a secret from millions of fans who follow her every move.

At that time, everything seemed great in her career. Anitta approached the universe like she was game for anything. She was unafraid to talk about sex, plastic surgery ("My favorite one was my nose," she told Andy Cohen), and eventually politics. Fans pressured her to speak out against Brazil's former right-wing president Jair Bolsonaro when he was campaigning in 2018, and though Anitta wasn't very political — she's said she "started to have access to a good education after I got money" — she studied up. Soon, she was one of Bolsonaro's most outspoken critics.

By 2020, a Brazilian newspaper ranked her the third-most-influential political figure in the country, and when elections came in 2022, journalists wrote about how much sway her endorsement had. (Anitta supported current president Luiz Inácio Lula da Silva.) Meanwhile, her music was bigger than ever: "Envolver," from her 2022 album, *Versions of Me,* made her the first solo Latin artist to reach Number One on Spotify's Global chart. In 2022, she became the first Brazilian artist to win a VMA.

It felt like she was everywhere, constantly working, constantly creating, constantly weighing in. But she was exhausted. "In the beginning, when things were going unbelievably amazing and fast and crazy, it was because I was just having fun," she says. "At some point when things got huge, I started to care, with pressure and numbers and 'Oh, my God, keep my high-level profile!'" Her illness forced her to slow down and think about the never-ending grind her life had become. "It was hard for me to turn off the importance that I used to give to these opinions ... like, 'Oh, am I big enough now? I was big last year. This year I'm not so big. Oh, I'm failing.'"

As she healed physically, she focused on her spiritual and mental well-being. "We can literally die tomorrow," she says. "All of these people saying, 'Oh, she's not hot anymore. Oh, she was hot last year'.... They will completely forget about you. Your life is over, and their lives keep going. And you lived only to maintain yourself in these people's minds and thoughts, even though they don't actually care."

Major career changes followed. In March 2023, she vented on Twitter about wanting out of her contract with Warner Records. "If there was a fine to pay, I would have already auctioned off my organs, no matter how expensive it was, to get out," she tweeted. She blasted the label for using a photo of her with "Envolver" playing in the background on International Women's Day, saying execs originally told her the song would "never break without a feat[ure] cuz I wasn't strong enough for that." "I already accepted the sad unfair fact that I'm the major investor here and asked the label to just do the simple job they were supposed to: promote my music," she wrote.

She says she spoke up because nothing else worked. "Nowadays, I think it was a little immature, but also it was a little desperate. I was desperate," she says. "It is what it is. Nowadays, being more mature, I would maybe do it differently. But maybe if I did differently, I wouldn't be where I am right now."

Warner and Anitta announced they were parting ways in April 2023. ("I really appreciate the way things ended," she says diplomatically.) A few weeks later, she signed with Universal's Republic Records — and then in June, news broke that she'd split from her longtime manager Brandon Silverstein. Anitta brought on Rebecca Leon, known for working with Rosalía, a change that marked a clean break in her career. Anitta has worked to keep it that way. She avoids drama; when people sent her a viral video of Silverstein screaming at someone on Zoom, she didn't comment. "This is not the type of thing that I'm trying to attract to my life," she says. "I was like, 'Guys, I don't want to be part of this conversation, to be honest.'"

Instead, she lasered in on the album, determined to make Brazilian funk right. "When I go to the studio, sometimes I hear people trying to do it, but it's still sounding very gringo," she says, laughing. Gorky remembers that she was hell-bent on getting unexpected sounds. "She's like, 'Nah, that's too commercial. That's way too pop, there's nothing new and exciting about this. Show me more.' And then we would start showing her really weird stuff, and she's like, 'That's what I'm looking for,'" he says.

The final product reinforces the funk with touches of reggaeton and pop, and Anitta says it doesn't fit neatly into any category. "It's kind of like an artistic-alternative album," she explains. "It's not a mainstream of Latin because it's funk. It's not in the mainstream of the English world." She's let go of chart expectations. "When you're just trying to beat this person, beat that chart, beat that number, you don't have a purpose.... And for me, it's way more. I want to open doors for my people."

Anitta spent the beginning of 2024 back in Rio, getting ready for Carnival in February and preparing the album release. When we catch up in January, she admits that things have been more hectic than she wants. "When the work comes back to being crazy, as I am right now in Brazil, then I just feel like, 'Oh, my God, I took a step back,'" she says. But she makes time for yoga and meditation every day, and goes on spiritual retreats every five months or so.

Her favorite thing to do when she's off is to binge movies. "I've seen everything that you can imagine," she says with a laugh. The night before, she went to the movies with her family to see *Mamonas Assassinas: O Filme,* a biopic about a Brazilian rock band that made it big in the early Nineties before a plane crash killed all five members. Plane crashes seem to be a theme; she also watched *Society of the Snow,* recently, followed by the 36-minute making-of doc on YouTube.

A lot still weighs on her. She's deeply concerned about how obsessed with the internet and social media some of her fans seem to be. It breeds the kind of culture of constant comparisons and rankings she's trying to move away from. There's an accessibility to Anitta; she says she tries to do frequent meet-and-greets to talk to fans directly. But she's honest about what so much pressure can do to stars. "I tell them, 'You cannot wish for me to be healthy and at the same time charge me with charts and Number Ones everywhere in the world, in Latin [America], in Brazil. A person can't be healthy and Number One and happy at the same time,'" she says. "That comes back to this point of the internet, that people are not getting used to life being a cycle anymore. They want everything at the same time."

She's already influenced so much of public life in Brazil. Now, she hopes she can impart a few more lessons about letting go and staying present. "Let's just live life appreciating everything, not thinking, 'How am I going to get something from this?' Just doing things because you want to — that's the message I'm going to send with this album."

"I was thinking I was going to die. And I said, 'You know what? I'm going to do an album for myself in case it's the last thing I do, not worrying about if it's going to be on the charts.'"

UNCOVERING THE RELEVANCE OF BIBIMBAP IN THE KOREAN WAVE

A SYMBOL OF KOREAN SOLIDARITY AND PLURALITY, AS WELL AS THE ABILITY OF FOOD TO SERVE AS A CULTURAL AMBASSADOR, BIBIMBAP IS BEING CONSUMED ACROSS COUNTRIES AS THE KOREAN WAVE ADVANCES

***By* DEBASHREE DUTTA**

COURTESY OF PIXABAY

Synonymous with the Korean wave, Hallyu has captured the attention of consumers with its enthralling films, dramas, variety shows, music, fashion, and culinary offerings. What, though, is the key to this pervasive phenomenon? It turns out to be in bibimbap, a staple in Korean cuisine. What the Korean wave fundamentally reflects—a sense of solidarity and shared love through an exclusive cultural exchange—is embodied in bibimbap's deeper significance of unity in diversity.

The Korean wave reflects the global upsurge in demand for Korean content. Since gaining traction in the late 1990s, it has grown rapidly to encompass nearly every part of the world, profoundly affecting both the Korean entertainment industry and our overall perception of Korean culture. From K-pop and K-dramas to Korean movies, the lasting impact of Korean pop culture is apparent; its extensive global presence and expanding attractiveness have culminated in a greater enthusiasm for all things Korean, notably its unique cuisine, one of the more fascinating features of which is its insistence on harmony and equilibrium.

Korean meals are famous for their diverse flavors, brilliant colors, and immaculate presentation. From the iconic bibimbap, a mixed rice dish with veggies, meat, and a spicy sauce, to the soothing aromas of kimchi stew, Korean food offers a singular dining experience that is satiating and wholesome.

Moreover, Korean cuisine boasts a rich history and heritage. Several recipes have been handed down through the ages, safeguarding the nation's unique cultural legacy. A fine instance of how Confucian principles have shaped Korean culture for years is the "bapsang," or traditional Korean table setting. It's got an assortment of accompaniments—rice, soup, and kimchi—all perfectly paired for a tasty, balanced feast.

Korea's Bibimbap Culture: Background and Importance

Bibimbap has extensive roots in Korean history and is thus culturally valuable. Bibimbap, which translates as "mixed rice," dates to the Joseon Dynasty, which spanned from the 14th to the 19th centuries. Bibimbap deemed a royal dish at the time, was enjoyed by the king and his entourage. It was cooked with the best produce and served artistically, emphasizing the value of food presentation in Korean culture.

Bibimbap symbolizes Korea's diversity and unity beyond just being savory. While the vivid variety of greens signifies the range of Korean food, the act of integrating the ingredients for bibimbap represents peace and unity. The deep resonance of this symbolism with Koreans contributes to the global popularity of bibimbap.

Using gochujang, the fiery sauce that unites all the items, is another way that bibimbap underlines its place in Korean culture. The flavors of gochujang are distinct and nuanced since it is comprised of fermented soybeans, red chili peppers, and glutinous rice. This sauce not only gives it a spicy kick but also portrays the Korean people's spirit. Gochujang's many flavors mingle, making a delectable blend, much like its varied ingredients.

BIBIMBAP'S VARIETY OF GREENS SIGNIFIES THE RANGE OF KOREAN FOOD. THE ACT OF INTEGRATING ITS INGREDIENTS REPRESENTS PEACE AND UNITY. THE DEEP RESONANCE OF THIS SYMBOLISM WITH KOREANS CONTRIBUTES TO THE GLOBAL POPULARITY OF BIBIMBAP.

Korean Buddhist traditions are also a major influence on bibimbap. Monks at Buddhist temples engage in "balwoo gongyang," a type of meditation in which they eat thoughtfully and savor the basic flavors of a vegetarian meal. Balwoo gongyang is ideally embodied by bibimbap, which primarily blends rice, vegetables, and sauce. Its recipe promotes appreciation for the bounty of natural resources and mindfulness.

People of all ages remain fond of bibimbap, which is a mainstay in Korean homes now. Bibimbap connects friends and family as they gather around a table to mix their bowls. Sharing and savoring this delectable meal enhances the bonds between family members and fosters a sense of community.

How Bibimbap Represents Korean Culture to the World

Bibimbap is now a globally recognized food. The essence of Korean cuisine is captured in its vibrant hues, succulent tastes, and distinct appearance. Through the introduction of bibimbap to an international crowd, Korean cuisine has gained more accessibility and stimulated interest in the broader aspects of Korean culture.

Bibimbap, as a representative of Korean cuisine, has actively served as a cultural ambassador for Korea, introducing people to the richness and diversity of Korean food culture. Imagine sitting in a bustling Korean restaurant, surrounded by the tantalizing aroma of sizzling meat, vibrant vegetables, and the unmistakable scent of gochujang. As you take your first mouthful of bibimbap, a symphony of flavors explodes in your mouth: the nuttiness of sesame oil, the tang of fermented kimchi, and the umami goodness of soy sauce. Each ingredient in bibimbap tells a story, reflecting Korea's history, geography, and customs.

So, there is a clear connection between the intensifying Korean Wave and the growing renown of bibimbap. With more familiarity and love for the dish, consumers are inclined to try other Korean dishes likewise. The opening of Korean eateries all over as a result of an increasing appetite for Korean food has contributed to the propagation of the Korean wave.

In all its splendor, bibimbap has evolved into a meal that many choose as a springboard to explore Korean cuisine. Due to its adaptability, countless permutations are possible, satisfying a wide range of dietary requirements and palates. Everywhere in the world, bibimbap has won over hearts and palates with its diverse offerings, ranging from the classic Dolsot bibimbap served in a sizzling hot stone bowl to more contemporary versions made with fusion ingredients.

Bibimbap and the Korean Wave: The Continued Growth of Korean Cuisine

There are no signs whatsoever that the Korean wave will abate. Hallyu's influence ought to keep growing, given the growing taste in Korean entertainment. With that, the love for food like bibimbap will skyrocket as fans of Korean pop culture pursue further into the realm of Korean cuisine, guaranteeing the Korean wave's longevity.

Bibimbap has already made remarkable strides in the global food scene, but its potential is far from exhausted. The versatility of this dish allows for endless variations, accommodating dietary preferences and trends. With its harmonious blend of flavors and visually appealing presentation, bibimbap has the potential to become a staple in international culinary circles, further cementing its influence on the Korean wave.

Bibimbap has, in a sense, been a window into Korean culture, drawing individuals from all over the world to dive into the intriguing realm of Hallyu. A symbol of Korean solidarity and plurality, as well as the ability of food to serve as a cultural ambassador, bibimbap is being consumed across countries as the Korean wave advances. So next time you indulge in a bowl of bibimbap, know that you're not just having an excellent meal; you're also getting a taste of the Korean wave firsthand. ®

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Reviews

Music

KACEY MUSGRAVES DIGS DEEP

One of country's most ambitious artists asks big questions on a muted LP

By JONATHAN BERNSTEIN

Kacey Musgraves
Deeper Well
INTERSCOPE/MCA NASHVILLE

For the past decade, Kacey Musgraves has been country music's most daring traditionalist — a small-town realist who's also a campy country-disco queen and a folkie who once wrote a song about smoking weed with John Prine. Her last LP, the 2021 post-divorce record *Star-Crossed*, was another reminder that her artistic comfort zone is pretty much wherever she lands on any given moment.

On the heels of her biggest hit yet, last year's Zach Bryan duet "I Remember Everything," there were several semi-predictable steps Musgraves might have taken for LP number five: chiming in on the current folk-stomp mania led by her recent duet partners Bryan and ➔

ILLUSTRATION BY
Sarah Jarrett

KACEY MUSGRAVES

Noah Kahan; returning to the hard-nosed country of her first two albums; taking the bombastic theatrics of *Star-Crossed* even further.

Deeper Well, Musgraves' latest, is none of the above, neither a return to country camp nor a deeper leap into pop spectacle. Instead, it's a rainy-day singer-songwriter record almost entirely devoid of swooping, radio-friendly hooks that revels in the unglamorous gray gloom of self-interrogation. It's another daring swerve, but while she often arrives at genuine moments of beauty, the end result is uneven.

Throughout the LP, Musgraves lays out her past few years of mid-thirties turmoil as an archaeological site to which she has exclusive access, pondering big-picture stuff like grief, the afterlife, and predestination. On "The Architect," a gorgeous acoustic ballad, she ponders life's meaning, and questions free will and God's existence, all in three minutes. On the synth-prayer "Sway," she wonders if she has the strength to surrender to the direction the wind is blowing her.

Musgraves is surely the only artist, country or otherwise, who is making records eclectic enough to crib ancient Scottish folk melodies on one song and interpolate a hook from rapper JID on the next. *Deeper Well* is Musgraves' third effort with Ian Fitchuk and Daniel Tashian, and the hallmarks of their collaboration — processed banjo, vocoder flourishes — can be heard throughout. By and large, the production touches, which risk being a crutch, are much lighter on a record where the songs speak for themselves.

But the second half of *Deeper Well* struggles to maintain momentum with a lack of dynamics and a string of tunes ("Heart of the Woods," "Dinner With Friends," "Anime Eyes") that don't quite hold their own. The sparse vulnerability of the production quickly exposes any imperfections, and some of the material feels more detached than determined.

Contrast that with a highlight like "Giver/Taker," an understated reflection on how much relationships can ask of two people, and a song that bears the fruit of all the digging Musgraves has done. It's not a big-swing statement, just a reminder that sometimes revelations — and career resets — are OK as long as the songs carry their weight. ®

BLEACHERS' HUNGRY HEART

Jack Antonoff works out his emo-Springsteen side and finds some personal glory By JON DOLAN

Jack antonoff has almost single-handedly made modern pop into a glorious safe space, an expansive, sensitive, creative biosphere where the biggest artists in the world — from Taylor to Lana to Lorde — can chase their wildest ambitions and find their most real inner selves while still making blockbuster records. Most A-list superproducers are pop scientists. Antonoff is a pop humanist.

Bleachers

Bleachers

DIRTY HIT

Antonoff (bottom right) and Bleachers

Bleachers is the project where he works out his band side. The three previous Bleachers LPs have highlighted an Eighties-tinged refusal to acknowledge that there should be any distinction between hook-ninja slickness and unrepentant sentimentality, a quality that's also there in Antonoff's mega-pop co-writing.

The fourth, self-titled Bleachers record doesn't veer too far from their previous LPs. Antonoff is an emo kid from New Jersey who worships Bruce Springsteen and is a firm believer in the spiritual ecstasy that can only be attained through the Platonic perfection of pop formula. *Bleachers* opens with Antonoff in low-talking Intimate Bruce mode over surging drums and a U2-size guitarscape, as he sets the LP's warmly nostalgic tone singing, "Future's past/I'm right on time." The Springsteen love really takes off on "Modern Girl," with its Clarence Clemons-like sax blasts, and car-radio-shout-along chorus. Antonoff sings about "modern girls shakin' their ass tonight," updating his retro rock with lyrics about meds and webcams.

He gets lovably personal on the synth-rocker "Jesus Is Dead," as he looks back on his own mid-2000s golden age of DIY tours and hanging out at the New York hipster dance night Misshapes. "I miss it, all the time," he laments, contrasting that indie Eden with the strange vibes these days of feeling like "the man who sold the world." He's similarly wistful on the National-style sad-dad rock of "Isimo" and on the folky "Woke Up Today," where Joni Mitchell acoustic chords back a tale of post-breakup bummedness.

Every element of the Bleachers experience comes together on the album's centerpiece, "Alma Mater." This one has sax magic and Boss mumbling too, but mainly knocks you over by subtraction rather than addition, boiling down the *Born to Run* idealism you hear elsewhere to an elegiac ambiance. Even Lana Del Rey's appearance on the track feels understated. Antonoff sings about listening to Tom Waits as he drives through Jersey looking for the heart of Saturday night. "Fuck Balenciaga/Right past the Wawa," he mutters, slipping into his runaway American dream. His life these days is more Balenciaga than Wawa, but *Bleachers* is a nice reminder of the sweet suburban kid at the heart of his Top 40 win. ®

BREAKING

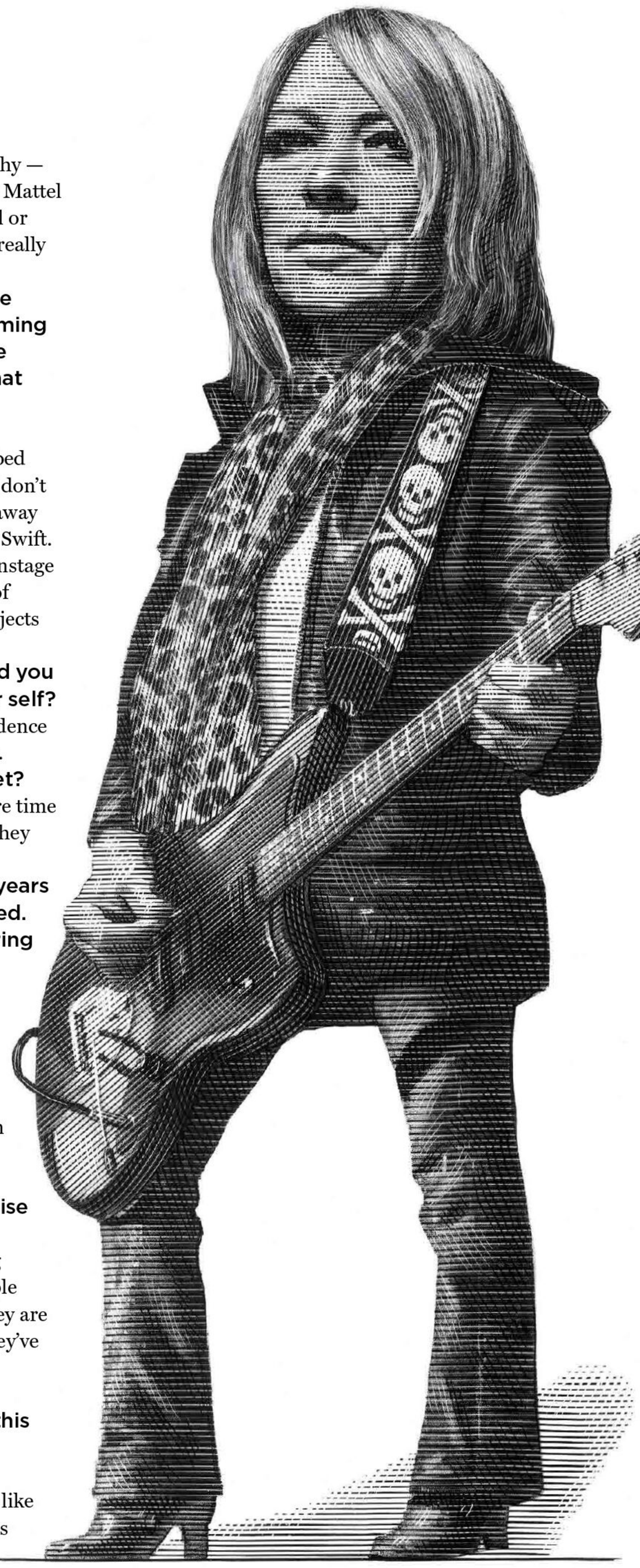
The Global Groove of Daymè Arocena

DURING THE PANDEMIC, powerhouse singer Daymè Arocena left her native Cuba, where she'd built a career as a top Latin-jazz vocalist. The move coincided with Arocena's shift toward pop as well, with results that should make her a stateside star. Produced by Eduardo Cabra of the long-standing Puerto Rican alt-hip-hop band Calle 13, her new album, *Alkemi,* is a marvelously electric fusion of sounds, from the R&B elegance of "American Boy" to "Suave y Pegao," a beautiful duet with urbano star Rafa Pabón. It's a must-hear conversation across genres, borders, and eras, gathered together by Arocena's grace and gravity. JON DOLAN

FROM TOP: ALEX LOCKETT; JOSHPAPI

Kim Gordon

On 'Barbie,' Kurt Cobain, and the presidential election



You moved back to your native state of California after Sonic Youth's breakup. How do you fit in there? Do you hike, for instance?
I'm not a hiker. I like my house. There's so much driving. But visually it's always been one of my favorite places. Just to look at the houses, the architecture … you can still feel the Seventies here.

Kim Gordon's new solo album, 'The Collective,' is out March 8.

You've put out two electronic-leaning solo albums. What have you learned about yourself that way?
That I worry a lot. I never really thought of myself as a musician. I still think of myself more as a visual artist who plays music. I still don't know chords and things like that. But I have realized that I do know some things about music and performing. It's kind of embedded in me and seems to activate at the right time. Even before [Sonic Youth ended], I thought, "Oh, by the time I'm 40 — that's too old to be doing this." But it's a lifestyle, like blues or jazz players who play all their life.

What's the last piece of art that moved you?
I saw some amazing movies, if that qualifies as art. *Zone of Interest* was brilliant.

What about *Barbie*?
I liked it. I had the original Barbie in 1959. It didn't bother me that the movie used that platform to go on this feminist rant. I liked Ken discovering the patriarchy — that was funny. It made Mattel seem like they were cool or something, and they're really just a corporation.

What did you make of the media proclaiming 2023 the "year of the woman" thanks to that movie, Taylor Swift, and Beyoncé?
I've also heard it described as the year of the doll. I don't mean to take anything away from Beyoncé or Taylor Swift. But the way they look onstage is kind of unreal. Both of them are these shiny objects of perfection.

What advice would you give to your younger self?
To have more self-confidence and not to be so serious.

What do you regret?
That I didn't spend more time with my parents while they were alive.

We're nearing 30 years since Kurt Cobain died. What are your enduring memories of him?
That is hard to believe, but it makes sense. My daughter was born that year and she's 29 now. I still have very vivid images of him laughing, smiling, and goofing around.

Nirvana merchandise is selling well lately.
It cracks me up walking around and seeing people wearing that. Maybe they are into Nirvana. Maybe they've never heard of them!

What are your hopes and fears for this election year?
My hope is that Biden drops out and someone like Gretchen Whitmer steps in. My fear is that we're going to have Trump and Biden again.

How about your own governor, Gavin Newsom, running?
He wouldn't be the worst, but he would have to de-slick himself if he wants to be president. Change the hair.

What would it take to interest you in a Sonic Youth reunion show or tour?
I don't know. It would never be as good as it was.

What did you think of Thurston Moore's memoir?
I haven't read it. I'm happy for him that he's finally got it out there.

What's the best advice you ever got?
Neil Young told me that it doesn't matter how good your voice is, in terms of range or whatever. It's about how authentic it sounds. That stuck with me.

It's been nearly 10 years now since your bestselling memoir, *Girl in a Band,* was published. What impact did writing it have on you?
I guess I thought about my life more: where I came from. I've always felt pretty much like the same person I was when I was, like, five. I guess it made people more interested in me.

Did the book's success surprise you?
Definitely, yeah. It wasn't my idea to write a memoir, honestly. I think people saw how well the Patti Smith memoir did, so they were kind of looking around. I thought, "I do like to write. Maybe this is a good time to figure out how I got to where I am."

What conclusion did you reach on that?
I'm not a believer in conclusions.

DAVID BROWNE

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